

*Inspiring  
Moments  
in  
Islamic History*

Waheed Ahmad

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1. Introduction
2. Inspiring Moments in Islamic History
3. Bibliography

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# LIST OF CONTENTS

## Introduction

## Inspiring Moments in Islamic History

• The Prophet Muhammad <sup>pbuh</sup> (570-632 C.E.)	3
• Abu Bakr bin Abu Qahafa (572-634)	36
• ‘Umar bin Khattab (586-644)	47
• ‘Uthman bin Affan (574-656)	54
• Ali bin Abu Talib (599-661)	61
• Ja‘far bin Abu Talib (601-629)	69
• Abu Sufyan bin Harb (560-650)	72
• Ikrimah bin Abu Jahl (580-636)	76
• Bilal bin Rabah (580-640)	79
• Abdullah ibn Hudhaifah Al-Sahmi	86
• Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah (583-639)	88
• Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf (580-652)	93
• Talha bin Ubaidullah (595-656)	98
• Zubair ibn al-Awwam (594-656)	103
• Awais Qarani (594-657)	105
• Sa‘d bin Abi Waqas (594-664)	108
• Abdullah bin Mas‘ud (598-650)	110
• Fatima Zahra bint Muhammad (605-632)	114
• ‘A’isha bint Abu Bakr (610-678)	117
• Habib ibn Zaid Al-Ansari (611-631)	122
• Abdullah bin Abbas (618-687)	126
• Al-Ahnaf ibn Qais (625-695)	130
• ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz (682-720)	133
• Malik bin Dinar (658-748)	136
• Abu bin Adhem (700-777)	139
• Rabia Basri (717-801)	144

• Bayazid Bastami (804-876)	149
• Junaid Baghdadi ( 830-910)	156
• Abul Hasan Kharqani (963-1033)	160
• Abu Sa‘id Abul Khair (967-1049)	163
• Abul Hasan Al-Hujweri (990-1077)	169
• Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058-1111)	174
• Abdul-Qadir Jilani (1077-1166)	178
• Fariduddin Attar (1145-1221)	184
• Mu‘inuddin Chishti (1142-1236)	190
• Mohaiuddin ibn Al-‘Arabi (1165-1240)	193
• Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273)	197
• Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325)	206
• Amir Khusrow (1253-1325)	209
• Bahauddin Naqshband (1318-1389)	212
• Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1561-1624)	217
• Shah Waliullah (1703-1762)	221
• Mirza Ghulam Ahmad <sup>as</sup> (1835-1908)	223
• Hakim Nuruddin (1841-1914)	238

Bibliography	246
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## INTRODUCTION

The history of Islam is laced with beautiful examples of selflessness, bravery, and integrity of character. Add to this the uniquely Islamic perspective of love of God and mystical wisdom and we obtain a kaleidoscope of golden deeds and sayings that adorn our glorious and rich heritage. Such greatness of character is all the more striking when it is observed in persons who, before accepting Islam, were seeped in ignorance and bigotry and could easily be considered the dregs of humanity and the worst creatures under the firmament.

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) started preaching Islam in 610 C.E., the Arabs held animistic beliefs and worshipped idols and images in the form of birds, animals and humans. They had no moral code to regulate their behaviour and openly practised many atrocities. Personal vendettas were common and many newborn baby-girls were buried alive for fear of poverty. A person's life had little value and a person's honour, even less. Slavery was rampant; women were second-class citizens; and the poor in society simply did not count.

It was against such backdrop of medieval ignorance that Islam presented a simple theology, emphasis on human fellowship, and new perspectives on moral excellence. While much of what Islam introduced was already known to the Jews and the Christians, it was completely new to the polytheistic Arabs. And it was the Arabs that dominated the land of Arabia. In their eyes, Islam not only berated their idols but also shook the very foundation of their society that was established on the basis of ethnic superiority, class distinction and social prejudices. Most of all, the Arabs could not tolerate the divisive aspect of the new faith that split their tribes into believers and non-believers.

Thus, opposition to Islam was vigorous and at times brutal. No stone was left unturned in making it difficult for the people to accept the new faith. Slaves were tortured; women were beaten; and family members were boycotted. Occasionally, people were killed. Every effort was made

to make life difficult for the new converts—as punishment for their transgression and an example to others.

As Islam gradually took hold in the Arab culture, the disposition and character of the people began to change. The slaves began to be treated humanely and many were set free; the women began to be respected and consulted in important affairs; the poor and the hapless found help and sympathy; and knowledge began to be sought and cherished. For the first time in many centuries, the Arabs learned the true meaning of fundamental human rights. Consequently, not only did they bring themselves out of a state of ignorance, but they also took the flame of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment to other peoples who came under their sway in the surrounding lands.

The present book attempts to capture some of these stories of magnificent behaviour and excellent character of the Muslims. They represent short snippets in the life of a person, occasionally lasting only a moment or two. But in that brief moment, the words that these persons uttered, or the wisdom that these persons expounded, or the behaviour that these persons displayed, entrusted these incidents to the golden archives of human history.

Also included in this compilation are selected thoughts and sayings of some noted Muslim mystics and scholars. Frequently living the life of a dervish, these mystics gave to the world their inner thoughts and beliefs concerning their journey of love on the path of the Beloved. Some of these mystics were eminent poets of their time or otherwise indulged in poetic writings. In such cases, selections are also presented from their poetry for the inspiration of the reader.

The sayings and deeds mentioned in this compilation are mostly spontaneous reflections of the very soul of the person behind them. Although brief in time and content, they are vast in wisdom, insight and spirituality. In most cases, they took place after a lifetime of character-building, intense meditation and devotion to God. Thus, the reader will benefit by contemplating over these incidents and fully appreciating the beauty hidden within them. Appropriate background to the incidents is provided for the benefit of the reader where necessary.

While these inspiring actions, sayings and thoughts are clearly part of our Islamic legacy, they also bring great honour to the combined heritage of mankind in general. At this point it should be noted that such examples of lofty character and display of unusual signs are not unique to Islam; they are found in other religions and in other communities in the world as well. However, the frequency with which they occur in the history of Islam is definitely a great sign of the veracity of this faith.

Exactly fourteen centuries have passed since the beginning of Islam. During this period, thousands of saints, Sufis, and other noteworthy personages have lived whose lives can be a source of inspiration to us. Despite the fact that men of God are not vain and generally tend to conceal their personal greatness and spiritual achievements, there are literally countless incidents that have been passed down in history to be included in any single volume. Thus, the reader may find many of his or her favourite personages and incidents omitted from the present compilation. For the sake of brevity, the writer has selected some forty-five persons and has taken inspiring moments only from their lives. The book begins with the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and ends with the time of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>, the promised servant of the Holy Prophet. In between the two, there is a multifarious collection of caliphs, scholars, warriors, rulers, poets, jurists, saints, Sufis and dervishes. While their achievements vary considerably in degree and scope, they all have one thing in common: they all have left behind a legacy that can inspire us to our own greatness.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that at the root of all the golden deeds and sayings of great Muslims is the exemplary character of their spiritual master, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. It was his untiring effort to personally train the early Muslims and to leave behind his own teachings and traditions that set the high standard of moral excellence and produced an ideal role model for the later Muslims to follow. Thus, the achievements of the Muslims that are briefly narrated here clearly attest to the sublime character and the untiring efforts of the Teacher himself. May God handsomely reward the Teacher and look kindly upon all his pupils.

Several persons have directly or indirectly contributed to the collection of stories mentioned here. Many tales are ubiquitous among the Muslims

and many readers will be well familiar with them already. Generous use has been made of several publications that are listed as bibliography and frequently referenced at appropriate places. The purpose of this compilation, as the title of the book aptly suggests, is to inspire the reader to adopt like behaviour and like perspectives.

Finally I would like to express my gratitude to those who have painstakingly reviewed this manuscript and made several and very important changes to improve its text and appearance. For the review carried out in Canada, I would like to thank Mr. Lal Khan Malik, Amir Jama'at Ahmadiyya Canada, and for the review carried out in the United Kingdom, I would like to thank Mr. Munir-ud-Din Shams, Additional Wakilut-Tasneef, London. Both these gentlemen helped immensely with the process of review and approval for publication. Any omissions, errors or shortcomings that may still remain in the compilation are the sole responsibility of the writer.

(Pir) Waheed Ahmad  
Mississauga, Canada  
November 11, 2014



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## **The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> (570-632 C.E.)**

Coming in the tradition of the Israelite prophets before him, and bringing a new Law for the Muslims, the essence of the Prophet Muhammad's message was worship of One God and kindness to people. On both points, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) set new heights of excellence and, through his own example, set a new model for the Muslims to follow. He literally gave a new meaning to the word "worship" and a totally new dimension to the concept of "human fellowship".



In the year 570 C.E.—the same year that Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was born—the Abyssinian viceroy of Yemen, Abraha, invaded Mecca with the intention of destroying the Ka'ba<sup>1</sup>. He had built a magnificent cathedral at San'a<sup>2</sup> and wanted to divert the pilgrims to that place. Accompanied by a host of elephants, Abraha set up his encampment outside Mecca. It is reported that Abdul Muttalib, the grandfather of the Prophet, rounded up his fleet of camels and promptly took to the hills. When the people chided him for being more worried about his camels than the House of God, he said: "I am the lord of my camels. Let the Lord of the House protect His own House."

As the events unfolded, a severe pestilence broke out within the army of Abraha, killing most of them. While Abraha retreated back to San'a stricken by illness, the bodies of the dead left behind were picked upon by the birds<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The cube-shaped building that was the focal point of the ancient pilgrimage.

<sup>2</sup> San'a is the capital of present day Yemen and is considered to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Some Jewish people settled down here during the time of Solomon and the Sabaeans built a wall around the city when they established themselves in south Yemen in the first millennium B.C.

<sup>3</sup> Surah *Al-Fil* of the Qur'an (105:2-6) refers to this invasion and the resulting calamity that visited the army of Abraha.

●

It was the practice of Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> to retire to the Cave of Hira near Mecca for the purpose of meditation and reflection. One fateful night in the year 610 C.E., a most unusual event took place that eventually changed the destinies of nations and the lives of literally billions of people. In a vision, Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> saw an angel who embraced him tightly and asked him to read. When Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> replied that he could not read, the angel repeated again for him to read. Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> gave the same answer. After the third time, the angel instructed:

“Read, in the name of thy Lord who created,  
Created man from a clot of blood.  
Read, and thy Lord is most Beneficent;  
Who taught by the pen,  
Taught man what he knew not.”<sup>4</sup>

These five short lines mark the beginning of Muhammad’s prophetic mission that lasted some twenty-two years. The incident was unusual not only because it started a moral and spiritual revolution that enveloped Arabia and the adjoining lands, but also because it took place after nearly six centuries of Divine silence. The drought of Divine munificence was finally lifted with a drizzle of God’s grace and mercy upon mankind. Over the next two decades, this drizzle turned into a heavy downpour that watered the spiritually dry landscape of the world and ushered in a new era in the history of mankind.

●

Sympathy for the fellow being was a fundamental aspect of the Prophet’s own nature and was quite apparent to all. When, after receiving the first revelation, he trembled at the thought of having to bear such heavy responsibility that was being placed upon his shoulders, his wife Khadija consoled him with the following words:

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<sup>4</sup> Surah Al- ‘Alaq, 96:2-6.

“God is witness, He has not sent you this Word that you should fail and prove unworthy and that He should then give you up. How can God do such a thing, while you are kind and considerate to your relations, help the poor and the forlorn, and bear their burdens? You are restoring the virtues that had disappeared from our country. You treat guests with honour and help those who are in distress. Can you be subjected by God to any trial?”

●

After the incident of the first revelation, Khadija took the Prophet to her cousin, Waraqa bin Naufal. The latter was an Ebionite<sup>5</sup> Christian, now in advanced years and almost blind. Although born among the polytheistic Quraish, Waraqa had closely studied the Judaic and Christian faiths and also had a reasonable command of the Hebrew language. He recognised the signs of prophecy in Muhammad’s experience and warned him of the impending mistreatment by his people. A narration by ‘A’isha records the following conversation between Waraqa and Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>:

“O my nephew, what have you seen?” asked Waraqa.

God’s Apostle then narrated the visit by the angel and what he had commanded in the Cave of Hira.

Waraqa then remarked, “This is the same angel who was sent to Moses. I wish I was young and could live up to the time when your people would turn you out.”

God’s Apostle asked, “Will they drive me out?”

Waraqa replied in the affirmative and said, “Anyone who came with something similar to what you have brought would be treated with hostility; and if I should remain alive till the day when you will be turned out, then I would support you strongly.”

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<sup>5</sup> Ebionites (derived from the Hebrew, meaning ‘poor’) refers to a Jewish Christian sect that existed during the early few centuries of the Christian Era. The members of the sect lived an ascetic life. They recognised Jesus as the Messiah but otherwise followed traditional Jewish rites and practices. They believed in the Jewish Gospels which have not survived but their reconstructed texts are now included under the New Testament Apocrypha (The Gospel of Nazarenes; The Gospel of the Ebionites; and The Gospel of the Hebrews).

Waraqah, however, died a short time later. He did not live long enough to see either the fulfilment of his own ominous words when the Muslims were tortured and driven out of Mecca, nor the eventual success of the new faith that spread like lightening from the Atlantic coast of northwest Africa to the Indus and Oxus<sup>6</sup> Rivers in the east.



When the Prophet was commanded to take the message to his kin, he climbed on top of Mount Safa in Mecca and called out:

“O people of Quraish! O people of Quraish!”

Hearing his call, the people of Quraish gathered around him and asked as to what was the matter. The Prophet said:

“If I tell you that there was an army behind this hill, would you believe me?”

They replied, “Indeed, for we trust you, and we have never known you to tell a lie.” The Prophet then said:

“Know then that I am a Warner and I warn you of a severe punishment. O Banu Abdul-Mutallib! O Banu Abd Manaf! O Banu Zuhra! O Banu Taim! O Banu Makhzum! O Banu Asad! God has commanded me to warn my nearest kinsmen, that I can guarantee to you no good on the earth or in Heaven unless you witness that there is none worthy of worship except God.”

Hearing this, the Prophet’s own uncle, Abu Lahab, got up and said, “Perish thou this very day! Was it for this that thou assembled us here?”



As Islam began to be accepted by more and more persons, the leading tribe of the Quraish became increasingly more hostile towards the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Finally, they went to the Prophet’s uncle, Abu Talib, and offered to give all sorts of riches to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> if he gave up his mission. The uncle called the Prophet and told him about the wishes of the Quraish. On hearing this, the Prophet replied:

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<sup>6</sup> Oxus River (or Amu Darya) is a major waterway in Central Asia. It is formed by the junction of Vakhsh and Panj Rivers and flows into Aral Sea. In ancient times, Oxus River was regarded as the boundary between Greater Iran and Turan (land of the Turks).

“O my uncle, if they were to place the sun on my right hand and the moon on my left, I will not give up preaching the truth of One God. I must go on doing so until I die.”

●

Acceptance of abuse, humiliation, and torture is part of the life of any prophet. In this respect, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was no exception. In the manner of age-old tradition of God’s prophets, he faced all such treatment with patience, perseverance and prayer. Thus, when returning from an unsuccessful mission to the city of Ta’if where street vagabonds had pelted him with stones, an angel appeared and asked if the Prophet wished his persecutors to be destroyed. His calm reply was simply: “No. I hope one day their children will accept Islam and worship the One God.”

●

Once a member of the Arab tribe of Arash came to an assembly of the Quraish near the Ka’ba and complained that Abu Jahl had purchased some camels from him but had failed to make the payment. He asked for their help in recovering his money. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was also sitting in the mosque at the time. To make fun of the Prophet, the Quraish told the Arashi to go see Muhammad for help. The Arashi went over to the Prophet and repeated his predicament. The Prophet stood up at once and asked the Arashi to accompany him to the house of Abu Jahl.

The Quraish nobles were curious and asked a person to follow them and report back as to what transpired. When the Prophet arrived at the house, he knocked on the door and asked Abu Jahl to come out. When the latter emerged, his face seemed to be drained of all blood and he looked shocked. The Prophet asked him to pay the Arashi what was rightfully due to him. Immediately, Abu Jahl acquiesced to the request and, after fetching some money from inside the house, paid the Arashi in full. The person, who was following the two, reported the entire incident back to the Quraish nobles. When Abu Jahl re-joined the group, the entire assembly berated him for displaying such cowardly behaviour. At this, Abu Jahl cursed them in return and told them his side of the story:

“When I emerged from the house, I saw a large camel standing by the side of Muhammad. I had never seen such a head, such shoulders, and

such teeth on any camel in my life. By Allah! Had I refused, this camel would have devoured me!”



When the opposition in Mecca became so intense that the Prophet's very life was at risk, he quietly left the city in the secrecy of the night accompanied by his close Companion, Abu Bakr and a guide. The following day, a reward was announced for his capture. A Bedouin by the name of Suraja bin Malik went out looking for him. Eventually he caught up with the Prophet's party but had a sudden change of heart due to some premonition. As he narrated later, he became convinced of the veracity of the Prophet's claim and requested the Prophet to write him a guaranty of peace when he became supreme. At that moment the Prophet received a revelation and asked him:

“Suraja, how will you feel with the gold bangles of the Khusrow on your wrists?”

Somewhat amazed at this strange question, Suraja asked, “Which Khusrow? Khusrow, the Emperor of Iran?”

“Yes,” the Prophet replied.

Some fifteen years later, and some three years after the death of the Prophet himself, the prophecy was literally fulfilled. During the Caliphate of ‘Umar, the Muslims defeated the Sassanid forces in the Conquest of Ctesiphon (Mada’in), which was the seat of the Persian Empire. When the spoils of war were placed in front of ‘Umar, he noticed the gold bangles which Khusrow used to wear on state occasions. Remembering the Prophet's words, he called Suraja bin Malik and bade him to wear the bangles as a visible fulfilment of the prophecy. Suraja protested to this since the wearing of gold by men was not permitted by the Prophet. ‘Umar said that the occasion was an exception and that Suraja will have to wear them. To this Suraja reluctantly complied.



Working with his own hands and carrying out of household chores was not foreign to the Prophet's nature. One of his Companions, Abu Hurairah, narrates that when the construction of the Prophet's Mosque was underway in Medina, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was carrying the bricks



himself and it was obvious that he was suffering due to the effort. When Abu Hurairah offered to carry the bricks for him, the Prophet replied, “Abu Hurairah, you pick up the other bricks; the life of ease is only in the Hereafter.”



In Medina, there was a lady who routinely threw rubbish upon the Prophet as he passed by her house. When one day she failed to do it, the Prophet went to see her in case she had fallen ill.



One day the Prophet observed an old lady who was trying to carry a rather heavy load. The Prophet offered to carry it himself. As they walked together towards the lady's house, the lady constantly spoke ill of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, obviously unaware of the fact that he was walking by her side. Upon reaching the house, she thanked him profusely and wanted to know his name.



In 624 C.E., the Meccans raised an army of some one thousand fighters under the command of Abu Jahl and marched against the Muslims in Medina. The Muslims could barely muster a force of some 310 men. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> explained the situation to his Companions and waited for their advice. One Companion, Miqdad bin Amr, said: “O Messenger of Allah! We are not like the companions of Moses who said to him, ‘Go thou and thy God fight the enemy, but here we shall sit.’ We shall go wherever you command us. We shall fight on your right and on your left and in front of you and behind you.”

The Prophet continued to wait to hear the viewpoint of the Ansar<sup>7</sup>. Perceiving this, Sa'd bin Muaz, the chief of the tribe of Aws, said: “O Messenger of Allah! It may be that you are waiting for an expression of *our* view. We have believed in you as a true Prophet of God and have placed our hands in your hand in absolute commitment. Go wherever you

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<sup>7</sup> *Ansar* (meaning helpers) were the Muslims living in Medina. The Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina were called *Muhajirin*, or the immigrants.

will, we shall be with you... If you command us to jump in the sea, we shall jump into it and not one of us will hold back..."



Finding no way out of this confrontation, the Prophet raised a defensive force from his followers, numbering barely one-third that of the enemy. On the day of the Battle of Badr, the Prophet delivered a brief address on *jihad* after the Morning Prayer and started organising the Muslim force into battle arrays. One person by the name of Sawad bin Ghaziya was out of line and when the Prophet indicated for him to enter the line using his arrow, he got accidentally poked in the chest. Sawad immediately protested saying, "O Messenger of Allah, you have been raised by Allah with truth and justice. You have poked me with an arrow; I insist upon retribution." The Companions of the Prophet were shocked. However, the Prophet bared his own chest and asked Sawad to poke him back with his own arrow. Sawad stepped forward and instead kissed the Prophet's chest. When the latter inquired as to why Sawad had retorted to such machination, he replied in a trembling voice: "O Messenger of Allah! We are facing the enemy and I know not if I shall go back alive. I, therefore, wished that before my martyrdom I may touch your blessed body!"<sup>8</sup>



Just before the fighting started at Badr, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> gave the following direction to his people:

"Shoot your arrows and use your swords carefully. There are some people among the enemy who have joined them under coercion and they bear no enmity towards us. There are others to whom we owe gratitude for their kind treatment when we were persecuted in Mecca. If a Muslim finds any one of them at his mercy, he should spare him."

Then the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> retired to his tent and earnestly prayed to God in these words:

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<sup>8</sup> Zafrulla Khan, *Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980

“O God! Pray fulfil the promise that you have made with me. O God! If these few persons are wiped out today, then You may not be worshipped until the Day of Judgment.”

●

One day the Prophet was resting under the shade of a tree when a disbelieving Bedouin approached him and, holding a bare sword in his hand, asked the Prophet as to who could save him from harm. The Prophet calmly replied: “God”.

The Bedouin was stunned at this strange answer and the sword fell from his hand. The Prophet picked up the sword and now asked the Bedouin the same question. The Bedouin answered: “No one.”

The Prophet immediately corrected him by saying, “No. The same God that can save me can save you, too.”

●

Once Abdullah bin Salam, a leading Jewish rabbi, came to visit the Prophet with the intention of asking him three questions to ascertain his bona fide status. But after simply looking at the Prophet, he accepted Islam. Someone asked him for the reason for this sudden change of heart. He pointed to the radiant face of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and remarked, “By God, this face is not the face of a liar!”

●

In 625 C.E., the Meccans marched against the Muslims in Medina to avenge their defeat in the Battle of Badr. The Muslims met them near the mountain of Uhud. The Meccans fought with great bravery and used some unusual tactics to gain advantage over the Muslim force. Many Muslims were killed and the rest sought refuge in the nearby hills. However, one Muslim, Ibn Nazar, was fighting with great bravery when he came across ‘Umar bin al-Khattab in the battlefield who had thrown away his own weapon and was standing in great dismay. When Ibn Nazar asked for this reason, ‘Umar replied:

“What will we do fighting now? The Messenger of God has been martyred.”<sup>9</sup>

At this, Ibn Nazar remarked: “After him, what do we have to live for.”

Saying this, he pushed himself into the battlefield and fought bravely until he was cut down. After the battle, his sister recognised him only by his finger as his body had sustained marks of over seventy blows.”

●

The Prophet himself had received several injuries during the Battle of Uhud and was bleeding profusely from his face. After the battle, as the blood was being wiped off his face, he remarked:

“How shall a people prosper that treat their Prophet in such manner who calls them unto the Lord?”

Then he prayed: “O Allah, forgive my people, for they know not.”

●

The Muslims suffered greatly in the Battle of Uhud and a Muslim woman from Medina named ‘Afifa lost several relatives of her own. As she came out of Medina to receive the news of the Battle of Uhud, she asked the returning people as to the condition of the Prophet. Someone told her that her own father had been killed in the fighting. She asked again as to the condition of the Prophet. She was told again that her brother had been killed, too. She asked again as to how was the Prophet. This time she was advised that her husband had also been killed in the battle. She again asked as to how the Prophet was. She was finally told that the Prophet was safe. At this, she remarked:

“With thee alive, all other calamities are trivial. May I, and my father, and my brother, and my husband, be all sacrificed for thee!”

●

One day a Jew praised the Prophet Moses in such a way that it appeared to rank him higher than the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. At this, a Muslim was enraged and slapped the Jew. The latter came and complained

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<sup>9</sup> Of course the news of the Prophet’s death in the Battle of Uhud was based on a false rumour.

to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. When the Prophet heard of the incident, he remarked, “Do not accord me pre-eminence over other prophets....”



Sometime in 625 C.E., the same year as the Battle of Uhud, some men from the tribe of Banu Qara came to Medina and asked the Prophet to send some missionaries with them to teach them about Islam and the Qur'an. When the six missionaries thus selected reached a place called Raji' belonging to the tribe of Hudhail, they were set upon by two hundred men according to a previously hatched plan. Four of the missionaries were killed during the skirmish while two, Khubaib Ansari and Zaid bin Dathina, were captured. The two prisoners were eventually sold to the Quraish who intended to kill them to avenge the deaths of their own relatives lost in the Battle of Badr.

Just before Zaid bin Dathina was executed, Abu Sufyan asked him, “Tell me, O Zaid, would you not prefer that Muhammad was here in your place to receive this punishment while you were safe at home with your own people?” To this Zaid replied, “I certainly prefer that Muhammad be where he is, safe from harm. It is more preferable to me than my being with my own people.”

When the second prisoner, Khubaib Ansari, was being led to his place of execution, he asked for permission to say two *rak'as*<sup>10</sup> of *nafl*<sup>11</sup> Prayer. He kept his Prayer short and after completing it, said to his executioners, “I wanted to prolong my last Prayer but was afraid that you might think that I was afraid of dying.”

Just before offering his head to the executioners, Khubaib recited these verses from a poem:

“As I am being slain while I am a Muslim,  
I care not in which direction my body falls;

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<sup>10</sup> Each *raka'a* or genuflexion includes: standing, bowing and prostration.

<sup>11</sup> *Nafl* Prayer is a supererogatory or non-compulsory Prayer that can be offered any time during the day.

All this is in the cause of Allah, and if He so wills,  
He will send down His blessings on my mutilated body.”

●

The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> led a very austere life and the gathering of wealth was simply against his nature. One day, the Prophet went for a walk with a noted Companion of his by the name of Abuzar Ghiffari. As the mountain of Uhud came into view, the Prophet remarked to Abuzar:

“If I have gold equal to the weight of that yonder mountain, I would never care to look at it or have it with me on the third day except that which will be required to pay off my debts. The rest I will distribute among the slaves of Allah.”

●

Whatever gifts the Prophet received from the people were immediately given away in charity and little was kept for his own use. One day the Prophet was sitting in the mosque, getting ready to lead the Muslims in the afternoon prayer. Suddenly, he left his place and, moving over the shoulders of several persons sitting in the rear ranks, went to his home. When he returned soon after, the people naturally inquired if all was indeed well. The Prophet replied that someone had given him a piece of gold the day before and he had suddenly realised that it was still at his home. He had gone back to fetch the gold piece and had now given it away in charity.

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The Prophet’s lifestyle went beyond austerity and actually bordered on poverty. Several days would go by before any fire would be lit in the hearth of his kitchen. Although given to excessive generosity, there were days when there was nothing in the house to be given away. Poverty in fact was so dear to the Prophet’s heart that he used to say, “Poverty is my pride.” He also used to pray:

“O Lord! Keep me alive a poor man, and let me die poor; and raise me amongst the poor.”

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Once a man came to the Prophet and said, “Verily, I love you.”  
The Prophet replied, “Be careful as to what you say.”

The man repeated again, three times, “By God! I love you.”

The Prophet said, “If you are sincere, then prepare yourself for poverty; for poverty reaches him, who loves me, quicker than a torrent reaches the sea.”



The Prophet used to say:

“On the Day of Judgment, God shall say, ‘O My friends, come near Me.’ At this the angels will inquire, ‘Who are Thy friends?’ God will then answer, ‘The poor<sup>12</sup> and the humble!’”



Unlike the Arab practice of the day, the Prophet had given great freedom to his wives to speak their mind. One day, the wives made some excessive demands from the Prophet and also bickered among themselves. Being distressed by their behaviour, the Prophet secluded himself, promising to stay away from them for the entire month. Afraid that the Prophet may be divorcing his wives—including Hafsa, the daughter of ‘Umar—the latter went to see the Prophet who was lying down on a bare mat. There were marks of the mat upon his body and the only food in the room was a handful of barley lying in the corner. The scene moved ‘Umar to tears. When the Prophet asked ‘Umar as to why he wept, he said:

“O Messenger of Allah, why should I not cry? This mat has left marks on your sides and I see your store of food. Kaiser and Khusrow are leading their lives of plenty, while you are the Messenger of Allah and His Chosen one, and look what you have!”

The Prophet replied, “‘Umar, isn’t it enough for you that for us there is the next world, and for them there is this world?”



When from his isolation from his wives, the Prophet suddenly came down after twenty-nine days, ‘A’isha was pleasantly surprised and asked

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<sup>12</sup> Ali Hujwari, the well known mystic and the writer of the *Kashful Mahjub* defines “poor” as such a person whom the presence of worldly means does not make him independent and the absence of worldly means does not make him deprived. Neither has he any love for worldly possessions, nor the loss of anything can hurt him.

as to what happened to his promise of staying away for a month. To this, the Prophet replied with a smile, “Don’t some months have twenty-nine days?”



There was a lady in Mecca by the name of Hind bint Abi Umaiyya (also known as Hind al-Makhzumiya) who had accepted Islam in the very early days. She was married to Abdullah ibn Abdul-Asad (also known as Abu Salma). Both suffered greatly at the hands of the Quraish in Mecca and took part in the migrations to Abyssinia and Medina. Her husband was critically wounded in 625 C.E. fighting first in the Battle of Uhud and then during the Expedition of Qatan soon after.

Hind bint Abi Umaiyya narrates that she had heard from the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> that when a calamity befalls a Muslim, he prays: “Indeed we belong to Allah and indeed unto Him we will return”. Hind bint Abi Umaiyya narrates that after the death of her husband, she said the same prayer that was taught by the Prophet and added: “O God, reward me for my affliction and compensate me with that which is better.” Hind bint Abi Umaiyya narrates further that she thought to herself that what Muslim could be better than her martyred husband, Abu Salma. But then the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> sent her a proposal of marriage, she accepted it and became his wife, known popularly as Umm Salma.<sup>13</sup>

When the fourth Caliph, Ali bin Abu Talib, was proceeding to Basra for the Battle of Jamal, he came to pay his respects to Umm Salma prior to his departure. Umm Salma had a son from her previous marriage to Abu Salma whom she offered to Ali, saying: “He is my only child. He is all that I have in this world. I offer him to you. He will, if necessary, sacrifice his life for you.”<sup>14</sup>



After having already mounted two attacks against the Muslims in Medina, the Quraish marched against them a third time in 627 C.E. At the

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<sup>13</sup> According to *Sahih Muslim* (Traditions according to Muslim).

<sup>14</sup> Narrated by Tabari and Ibn Khaldoon.



advice of his Companions, the Prophet refused to come out of the city for battle and had a trench dug around it to keep the invaders away. The digging of the trench was the idea of Salman al-Farsi, who was familiar with such tactics that were used in his own country, Iran. Later in his life, Salman narrated that when he was digging the trench, he came across a hard piece of rock that he could not break. The Prophet, who was standing nearby, took the implement in his own hand and struck the rock. At this a spark flew out and the Prophet exclaimed, “*Allahu Akbar*”—meaning, God is Great. According to Salman, this happened three times and the Prophet exclaimed “*Allahu Akbar*” each time. Salman then asked the Prophet as to why did he shout “*Allahu Akbar*” after striking the stone each time. The Prophet replied:

“The first time when I struck the stone, I was given the kingdom of Syria and I beheld the red-stone palaces. The second time when I struck the stone, I was bestowed the keys of Iran and I beheld the white palaces of Mada’in<sup>15</sup>. The third time when I struck the stone, I was bestowed the keys of Yemen and I beheld the doors of San’a<sup>16</sup>.”

One by one, all these kingdoms fell to the Muslim armies after the death of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>.



In 627/628 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> granted a charter of peace to the Christians of St. Catherine, located near Mt. Sinai. Some of the terms of the charter are as follows:

- The Muslims will protect the Christians and defend their churches
- The Christians were not to be unfairly taxed;

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<sup>15</sup> The word *Mada’in* literally means “cities”. It was the name given to an ancient metropolis formed by Ctesiphon and Seleucia on either side of the Tigris River in present day Iraq. The city of Ctesiphon lies on the east bank of Tigris and was the capital of the Sassanid Empire. It lies some 30 km southeast of the modern city of Baghdad. The city of Seleucia lies on the west bank of Tigris and was a great city during the Hellenistic and Roman times.

<sup>16</sup> San’a is the capital of present day Yemen.

### *Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

- No priests or monks were to be driven out of their churches;
- No pilgrim was to be stopped from his pilgrimage;
- The churches were not to be pulled down to build the mosques;
- Christian women married to Muslim men were to enjoy their own religion and were not to be discriminated against;
- The Muslims shall help in the repair of churches and monasteries;
- No Muslim was to violate the terms of this Charter.



Sometime around 628 C.E., a scouting party of the Muslims returning to Medina captured a suspicious looking person on the way who would not divulge his identity. They brought him to Medina where the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> recognised him as Thumamah bin Uthal, an influential chief from Yamamah. He was bitterly hostile towards Islam and was ever ready to slay the Muslims whenever he could. He had also conspired to kill the Prophet's emissary to the Chief of Yamamah.

At the order of the Prophet, Thumamah was confined to a house but was treated well and received food from the Prophet's own house. When one day the Prophet asked him as to what he had in his mind, Thumamah replied, "If you execute me, you would be justified as I have been guilty of grave offences against your people; but if you would extend benevolence to me, you would find me grateful..."

On the third day, the Prophet directed that Thumamah be set free. When he immediately walked out, people thought that he was returning to his homeland. However, Thumamah went to a nearby garden where he washed himself and returning to the mosque embraced Islam. Then he said:

"Messenger of Allah, there was a time when I entertained bitter enmity towards you and your faith and your city; but now you and your faith and your city are dearer to me than everything else."

Thumamah then left for Mecca where he performed his *Umra*<sup>17</sup> and began preaching to the people openly. For this he was rebuked and beaten

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<sup>17</sup> *Umra* or the Lesser Pilgrimage can be performed any time of the year as opposed to *Hajj* which is always performed during the designated time of the year.

up and may have lost his life but for the consideration that he was a tribal chief from Yamamah, which lay on the trading route of the Quraish caravans.

On returning to Yamamah, Thumamah stopped all food dispatches from his area to Mecca causing considerable hardship for the Meccan population. At this, the Meccans deputed Abu Sufyan and sent him to Medina to bring their distress to the Prophet's notice. When the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> learned of this, he sent directions to Thumamah not to interfere with the movement of food supplies.



In the year 628 C.E., the Prophet saw in a dream that he was performing the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba. Since leaving Mecca six years earlier, the Muslims had not been allowed back in the city. To fulfil his dream, the Prophet went to Mecca in the company of some 1500 followers. The Quraish, however, refused them entry into the city. After some misunderstandings and the fear of an imminent armed conflict, the Meccans and the Muslims managed to negotiate a peace agreement known in history as the Treaty of Hudaibiya. When the agreement was finally reached with Suhail bin Amr as the representative of the Quraish, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> asked Ali to write down the terms as he began to dictate.

The Prophet then started his dictation with the invocation: *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*—In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. At this, Suhail bin Amr objected saying that they did not know who Rahman was and, instead, proposed to write: *Bismika Allahumma*—in Thy name, O God. Some of the Prophet's Companions objected to this but the Prophet said to write it down. The Prophet then continued to dictate:

“These are the terms of the truce between Muhammad the Messenger of Allah and Suhail the son of Amr.”

Suhail protested again, saying, “If we knew that you were the Messenger of God, we would not be stopping you from performing the pilgrimage neither would we have fought with you. So write instead ‘Muhammad the son of Abdullah.’”

By this time Ali had already written down the dictated phrase: ‘Muhammad the Messenger of Allah’. The Prophet asked Ali to strike it out and write in its place ‘Muhammad son of Abdullah’. Ali was so loath to strike out the phrase ‘Messenger of Allah’ that the Prophet had to do it with his own hand.



However, the terms of this treaty were extremely unfavourable for the Muslims and appeared downright humiliating on the surface: the Prophet could not use the invocation or refer to himself as the Messenger of God; young Meccans accepting Islam had to be returned back to Mecca while young Muslims joining the Meccans would not be returned; and Muslims had to go back to Medina this year and come back for the pilgrimage the following year. The only positive feature of the Treaty appeared to be a total ban on mutual hostilities for a period of ten years.

While the Treaty was still being put to the pen, Suhail’s own son, Abu Jandal, staggered into the Muslim camp wearing marks of injuries on his body. He told the Muslims that as he had embraced Islam, he was being tortured. He begged not to be returned to Mecca as he was afraid that he would not survive further cruelty. His father, Suhail bin Amr, immediately demanded that his son be handed over to their custody. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was greatly moved by Abu Jandal’s condition and pleaded with his father to let him remain with the Muslims. Suhail, however, was adamant that according to the terms of the Treaty that they had just agreed upon, he had the right to take his son back to Mecca. The Prophet then addressed Abu Jandal, saying:

“Have patience, and put your trust in Allah. He will certainly provide for your freedom and the freedom of other persons like you. We are unable to help you, as we have entered into an agreement with the Meccans; we cannot go against our word.”



Although the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> had signed the document, ‘Umar was enraged at the humiliating terms of the Treaty. On the way back to Medina, ‘Umar approached the Prophet and asked:

“Are you not God’s Prophet?” The Prophet replied, “Yes”.

‘Umar then asked, “Are we not in the right and our enemies in the wrong?” To this the Prophet again replied, “Yes”.

“Then why do we yield in such low fashion?” asked ‘Umar.

The Prophet replied, “I am God’s Messenger and I will not disobey Him. He will give me victory”.

“But didn’t you see the dream and tell us,” ‘Umar persisted, “that we should go to the Ka’ba and perform the pilgrimage?”

“Yes,” replied the Prophet, “but did I tell you that it would have to be this year?”



The Treaty of Hudaibiya afforded a period of relative peace to the Muslims and soon the Prophet sent his envoys to various rulers around Arabia, inviting them to accept Islam. One such envoy was sent in 628 C.E. to Khusrow II (also known as Khusrow Parvez<sup>18</sup>), the Emperor of the mighty kingdom of Iran. After reading the Prophet’s letter, the King flew into a rage, tore up the letter and ordered the capture of the Prophet. When the news of this incident reached Medina, the Prophet remarked:

“Just as he has torn our letter, so will God tear his kingdom.”



In his wrath, Khusrow also ordered Badhan, his Governor of Yemen, to dispatch some guards to capture this claimant of prophethood and to present him before the King. When the guards arrived in Medina with the directive of their Governor, the Prophet told them that he will respond to their request the next day. When they came the following day, the Prophet told them, “Convey to your Governor that my Master has slain his master last night.”

The guards returned to Yemen and advised the Governor accordingly. Not much later Badhan received a dispatch from Kavadh II (also known as Sherweh), the son of Khusrow Parvez, that he had slain his father in the public interest. At this Badhan exclaimed, “Muhammad’s words have

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<sup>18</sup> Khusrow Parvez was the last great king of the Sassanid Empire and ruled over Greater Iran from 590 to 628 C.E.

been proved true. It seems that he is a true Prophet of God and I believe in him.”

He immediately wrote to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> informing him of his conversion and offering his allegiance to him. The Prophet allowed Badhan to continue ruling over Yemen.

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Khusrow II was murdered at the order of his own son whom he had imprisoned earlier and who had been freed by some noblemen loyal to him. After the murder of Khusrow II, four Sassanid Kings and Queens followed in succession within a short period of four years, most of them falling victim to palace intrigues and executions. Finally, the throne of Iran was entrusted to Yazdgerd III who reigned from 632 to 651 C.E. However, for the last eight of his nineteen-year reign, he was driven out of Balkh, the seat of his power, which had fallen to the Muslim forces in 643 C.E. during the Khilafat of ‘Umar.

The Sassanid dynasty, which was originally founded by Ardashir I in 224 C.E., ruled for 327 years over a vast region covering Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and much of the Caucasus region.

In 651 C.E.—some twenty-three years after Khusrow Parvez had torn the Prophet’s letter—the last of the Sassanid Emperors, Yazdgerd III, was murdered and the mighty Sassanid Empire totally disappeared from the face of the earth.

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A similar letter sent to Negus<sup>19</sup>, King of Abyssinia, received a different treatment. The King asked for a container and, placing the letter in it, said, “As long as this letter is safe, my kingdom is safe.” After the death of the Prophet, the Muslim armies marched into many countries. They conquered Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt,

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<sup>19</sup> Negus (Najashi in Arabic) was the title of Abyssinian kings. The specific king who ruled at the time was Ashama ibn Abjar (also known as Ashamat al-Najashi) who died around 631 C.E. and whose funeral prayer was performed by the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in absentia.

Tunisia, Morocco, Cyprus, India, Trans-Oxiana<sup>20</sup>, and the Anatolian plateau of Turkey. During all these conquests, they never touched the small kingdom of Abyssinia. This was for two reasons: Abyssinia had given refuge to early Muslims on two occasions, and King Negus had treated the Prophet's letter with great respect.



Along with the formal letter to Negus inviting him to Islam, the Prophet also sent a private letter asking him to perform his *nikah*<sup>21</sup> with Ramlah (589-666), the daughter of Abu Sufyan, who had sought refuge in Abyssinia during her migration from Mecca. During her stay in Abyssinia, her husband had converted to Christianity and had then passed away, leaving her a widow. She had also given birth to a daughter in Abyssinia and was then known by her *kunya*<sup>22</sup>, Umm Habibah.

It is reported that the marriage ceremony was performed by King Negus himself with Khalid ibn Sa'id acting as Umm Habibah's guardian. Negus offered a dowry of four hundred dinars to the bride—the largest dowry ever received by any of the Prophet's wives. Umm Habibah was then sent to the Prophet in Medina.

One day, Umm Habibah's father, Abu Sufyan, visited her in her house in Medina. This took place before the Conquest of Mecca and Abu Sufyan had not accepted Islam yet. Just when he was about to sit on a chair, Umm Habibah hastily removed the Prophet's blanket from the chair. Being offended by this act, Abu Sufyan remarked that Islam had caused her to lose respect for her own father. Umm Habibah replied that in her eyes, the

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<sup>20</sup> Historically, Trans-Oxiana is the area beyond the Oxus River in Central Asia that lies between Amu Darya (Oxus River) and Syr Darya (also known as Seyhun or Jazartes River). The historic name corresponds to the present day region consisting of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan and southwest Kazakhstan.

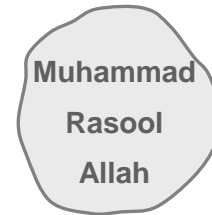
<sup>21</sup> *Nikah* is the formal contract of marriage in Islam.

<sup>22</sup> *Kunya* is a name of an adult under the Arab convention that is based on the name of their child, usually the eldest. The *kunya* is expressed as "Abu" (the father of) or "Umm" (the mother of). Occasionally, the *kunya* may be based on things other than a child.

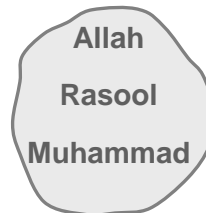
two had a different status and that he did not deserve to sit on the Prophet's blanket.”<sup>23</sup>

When the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> decided to send his letters to the rulers and kings in the neighbouring lands, he had a seal made out in the form of a silver ring that he could affix to the letters. The seal was to state: ‘*Muhammad Rasool Allah*’, meaning: Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah. As the phrase was too long to be written on a single line on the roundish seal, it was initially suggested to write it vertically as shown above. However, the Prophet's sense of respect and reverence for God would not tolerate the placing of his own name above that of Allah. Thus, the seal was finally designed to read as follows:

**Initial proposal**



**Final form of the seal**



The seal now read ‘*Muhammad Rasool Allah*’, starting from the bottom up! This was the format of the seal that was actually used by the Prophet to send all his letters.

In the year 630 C.E., about two years after the signing of the Treaty of Hudaibiya, the Meccans breached its terms. One of the Arab tribes in alliance with the Meccans had attacked and looted one of the Arab tribes

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<sup>23</sup> It is very likely that this incident relates to the period when Abu Sufyan was still a disbeliever. It is known in history that he had made several visits to Medina after the Hijra and before the Conquest of Mecca.



in alliance with the Muslims. The Meccans refused to dissociate themselves from their allies who were responsible for the breach. Nor would they sanction compensation to be paid to the injured party.

To put matters right, the Muslims marched against the city of Mecca. The Meccans were totally awed by the strength of the Muslims that now numbered some ten thousand. Hardly any blood was shed, as the Meccans decided to lay down their arms, and a general amnesty was extended to everyone. The Muslims had been tortured in this city and were eventually driven out of it. The residents of this city had perpetrated heinous acts against the Muslims and had not let them live in peace even after their emigration to Medina. They had persecuted them when they lived in Mecca and waged three battles against them even when they had left the city. However, on this day when the enemy lay vanquished and helpless at the mercy of the Muslims, a general pardon was declared and no revenge was sought. The British Orientalist, Stanley Lane-Poole (1854-1931), writes about this incident in his book *The Speeches and the Table Talk of the Prophet Mohammad*:

“Through all the annals of conquests, there is no triumphant entry comparable to this one.”

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When entering the city of Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad’s head was bowed so low in humility and gratitude to God that his beard touched the camel that he was riding on. When the leaders of the Quraish appeared before the Prophet, he asked them:

“What can you expect at my hands?”

“Mercy, O generous brother,” they replied.

The Prophet said, “I speak to you in the same words as Joseph spoke to his brothers. This day, there is no reproof against you. Go your way, for you are free.”

Many of the bitterest enemies of the Prophet could hardly believe their ears that such a general forgiveness was indeed granted under the circumstances.

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Soon after the Conquest of Mecca, the Muslims had to fight the surrounding tribes of Hawazin and Thaqif. The victory against them at the battlefield of Hunain gave the Muslims their largest spoils of war yet. From this, the Prophet gave generously to some of the newly converted leaders of the Quraish who had been staunch opponents of Islam before the Conquest of Mecca. The Ansar<sup>24</sup> felt left out and grieved at this act of generosity towards the new converts and some of them gave voice to their feelings. When the Prophet learned of their resentment, he asked for them to be assembled and addressed them:

“O Ansar! It has been reported to me that you do not approve of my distribution of the booty. Is it not true that when I came to you, you were languishing in misguidance and error, and God guided you to the truth through me? And is it not true that I found you in a state of poverty, and God made you affluent? And is it not true that I found you as enemy of one another, and God reconciled your hearts?”

After listening to each sentence of the admonition, the Ansar would say, “Indeed! God and His Prophet have been very generous.” The Prophet then continued:

“Why don't you say this, O Ansar, ‘It was you, Muhammad, who are under our obligation. Did you not come to us vanquished and defeated, and we came to your rescue? Did you not come to us exiled and rejected, and we gave you shelter? Did you not come to us in want and need, and we came to your help?’

“Had you replied to me in these words, you would have said nothing but the truth and I would have agreed with you. O Ansar, are you angry because I gave away some goods to those whom I sought to win to Islam? Because I considered that their faith could be confirmed by material goods, whereas I considered yours to be based on solid conviction?

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<sup>24</sup> *Ansar* (meaning helpers) were the Muslims living in Medina. The Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina were called *Muhajirin*, or the immigrants.

“Does this not satisfy you, O Ansar, that when other people return home loaded with goods and camels, you will return home with the Prophet of God? By Him Who controls Muhammad's soul, there is no people to whom I love to belong more than the Ansar.”

When the Ansar heard these words of great affection and sincerity from the Prophet's mouth, they burst into tears and shouted with one voice, “We want only Muhammad, the Prophet of God.”



Worship of God was the dearest thing to the Prophet's mind. He routinely used to wake up in the middle of the night and spend hours in praying to his Lord. ‘A’isha, his wife, relates that one night they had both retired to their bed when the Prophet turned to her and asked, “‘A’isha, if you give permission, I would like to spend my time in Prayer.” ‘A’isha narrates that the Prophet then got up, performed his ablutions, and spent the entire night in tearful supplications.



People often asked him as to why he spent so much time in prayers when God had already forgiven all his weaknesses and errors and promised him Heaven. His usual reply was, “Shouldn't I become the most grateful person then?”



Emphasising the importance of God's grace, the Prophet often used to say that no man will ever achieve salvation on the basis of his actions alone. When the people asked him if this applied to him as well, the Prophet answered, “Yes I, too, will not be able to achieve salvation except that God may envelope me with His mercy.”



The Prophet was extremely generous and always exhorted the people to adopt this trait. He often used to say, “A generous person is close to Paradise and far from Hell, while a niggardly person is close to Hell and far from Paradise.” At other times he said, “A generous infidel is better in the eyes of God than a miserly believer.”



The Prophet was very diligent in extending his respect to all, whether young or old, indigent or noble. Ali Hujwari, the writer of *Kashful Mahjub*, narrates the following story in this context:

“The Prophet Abraham would always wait for some guest to show up before partaking of any food. One time, three days went by when no guest came to his house. When finally a person showed up at his house, he inquired as to who he was. The visitor replied that he was a fire worshipper. The Prophet Abraham told him to leave as he was not worth receiving his hospitality and kindness. This earned Abraham admonition from God that while God could provide nourishment to the fire worshipper for seventy years, Abraham could not do it for a single instance.”

Referring to the above story of Abraham, Ali Hujwari writes that in contrast when the disbelieving son of Hatim Tai, Adi bin Hatim, came to see the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, the latter took his own cloth sheet and spread it out for the guest and remarked, “Whenever a gentleman from any community comes to you, you should treat him with respect.”



Once someone asked the Prophet as to what is faith. He replied, “It is to love God and His Prophet more than wife, children and property.” The Prophet used to pray as follows: “O my God! I ask for Thy love; I ask that I may love whosoever loves Thee; and that I may perform whatsoever Thy love makes incumbent upon me.”<sup>25</sup>



The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was extremely gentle of heart and dealt with people with great kindness and compassion. When asked to curse someone, he replied: “I have not been sent to curse, but as mercy to mankind.”



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<sup>25</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, (translated by Henry Augustus Homes)

Abdullah bin Ubai bin Salul was the leader of the Khazraj tribe in Medina. He was an hypocrite at heart who had accepted Islam outwardly but remained opposed to the cause in his heart. He would not waste any opportunity to render harm to Islam or berate the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. He was one of the foremost in accusing ‘A’isha, the wife of the Prophet, of unchaste behaviour when she was left behind by the caravan in the desert on one occasion. Yet, despite the persisting hypocritical behaviour of Abdullah bin Ubai, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was always kind to him. Once when Abdullah bin Ubai was taken ill, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> sat by his bedside and granted his wish to have one of his own shirts to serve as the funeral shroud for Abdullah bin Ubai. Upon the death of Abdullah bin Ubai in 631 C.E., the Prophet sent his shirt to use as shroud and also led his funeral prayer. It is reported that ‘Umar protested vigorously saying that Abdullah bin Ubai was an enemy of the Muslims and such honour should not have been accorded to him.



A couple of years before his death, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> said this in one of his sermons, “O Muslims! I do not fear from you that you will become idolaters. But I do fear that you may get entrenched in the worldly life!”



In 631 C.E., a delegation of some sixty Christians came to Medina from Najran, located in south-western Arabia near the border with Yemen. After staying in Medina for three days, a treaty was drafted in which the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> offered them peace with some notable terms of the charter given below:

- Peace and security is extended to their lives, their religion and their property;
- There shall be no interference with the practice of their faith or their observances;
- No bishop or monk or priest shall be removed from his church;
- No image or cross shall be destroyed and they shall not be oppressed;

### *Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

- No troops shall wage war against them and no tithe shall be levied upon them.

When the Christian delegation asked the Prophet for some place to perform their prayers, the Prophet offered his own mosque for this purpose.



Of all the human emotions, mercy was perhaps the closest to the Prophet's own heart. He often used to say, "Verily, God is more full of compassion to his servants than the affectionate mother to her nursing child."



Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, had lost her father, her uncle and her brother in the Battle of Badr and had sworn to seek vengeance. At the time of the Battle of Uhud, Hind persuaded Wahshi, an Abyssinian slave, to kill the Prophet's uncle, Hamza. After the Conquest of Mecca, Wahshi accepted Islam and came to Medina to personally ask for the Prophet's forgiveness. After the pardon was refused, Wahshi was terribly distressed and despaired. It was around this time that verse 54 of Surah *Al-Zumar* was revealed:

"Say, O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls! Despair not of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives all sins. Verily, He is Most Forgiving, Merciful." (*Al-Zumar*, 39:54)

After forgiving Wahshi, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> remarked that for this single verse of the Qur'an, he would not exchange the entire world and what it contained.



After the demise of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, several false prophets made claims to the leadership of Arabia. One such person was Musailma who rose up in Yamamah and claimed lordship of Arabia. Wahshi happened to participate in the army sent against Musailma and was the one

who actually killed him in the battle. In his old age, Wahshi used to reminisce:

“In the days of ignorance, I killed the best of men<sup>26</sup>, and in the arms of Islam I slew the worst of men.”

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Hasan and Husain, his two grandsons from Fatima and Ali, were very dear to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. ‘Umar bin Khattab narrates that one day he went to visit the Prophet and he saw Husain riding on his back holding two ends of a rope with the middle held in the Prophet’s mouth and the latter walking on his hands and knees. ‘Umar says that when he saw this scene, he remarked, “O Husain! Your camel is very beautiful!” At this the Prophet remarked, “O ‘Umar! The rider is very good, too.”

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When the Muslims started to gain dominion over the land of Arabia, the Prophet gave very clear and strict instructions as to the treatment of all non-Muslim subjects living within the state:

“He who kills any of those towards whom the Muslim state is under obligation will be deprived of the breeze of heaven. If a Muslim wrongs one towards whom the Islamic state has undertaken an obligation, or causes him loss, or requires from him that which is beyond his capacity, or takes from him something without his free consent, I shall demand justice for such non-Muslim against his Muslim wrong-doer on the Day of Judgment.”

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The main function of the Prophet was preaching and he discharged this trust most handsomely and conscientiously. He fearlessly preached his message to the high and the low, to the rich and the poor, to the near and the far. The most well-known of all his exhortations took place during his last pilgrimage to Mecca in 632 C.E. There, standing on the Mount of Mercy, he gave the following sermon<sup>27</sup>:

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<sup>26</sup> Referring to the killing of Hamza, the Prophet’s uncle, in the Battle of Uhud.

<sup>27</sup> For the sake of brevity, the sermon is presented here in an abridged form.

### *Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

“O people! Listen to my words, for I do not know if I shall be among you after this year. Remember, that you have to appear before your Lord Who will demand from you an account of all your actions.

“O people! You have rights over your wives and your wives have rights over you. Remember! You must always treat your wives with kindness. Woman is weak and cannot protect her own rights. When you married, God appointed you the trustees of those rights. You brought your wives to your homes under the Law of God. Therefore, you must not insult the trust that God has placed in your hands.

“O people! Feed your slaves as you feed yourselves and clothe your slaves as you clothe yourselves. If they commit a fault that you are unable to forgive, then pass them on to someone else. They are part of God’s creation and are not to be treated harshly.

“O people! Listen to my words and remember that all Muslims are brothers one unto another. As you are one brotherhood, you will not take your brother’s belongings that he does not give to you of his own goodwill. As well, guard yourselves against committing injustice.

“O people! Take note that I trample under foot all un-Islamic customs and traditions. All blood feuds are wiped out. As God has made you one brotherhood, so be not divided. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab or a non-Arab over an Arab. Nor is a white one to be preferred to a dark one, or a dark one to a white one. This day, retaliation for all murders committed in the Days of Ignorance is cancelled and all sums of interest are remitted.

“O people! Worship your Lord, observe Prayer, observe the Fast during Ramadhan, pay the obligatory alms cheerfully, perform the Pilgrimage, and obey those in authority among you. God will admit you to His paradise.

“As this month is sacred, and this area is sacred, and this day is sacred, so has God made the life and property of everyone sacred. It is therefore unlawful to attack the life or property of someone, as is the desecrating of this month,



### *Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

this area and this day. This exhortation is not only for today but until such time that you meet your Lord.”

Then the Prophet concluded his brief address with these parting words:

“What I have said to you, you shall tell the others who are not present.”



In the history of Islam, this Sermon on the Mount is known as the Farewell Address of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Anyone familiar with the faith of Christianity would find this address reminiscent of similar admonition delivered by Jesus Christ from the Mount of Olives, exactly six centuries before this. In fact, anyone familiar with the history of the world’s great religions would find a clear parallel in every word, every admonition, and every exhortation delivered on this day with the teachings of earlier Prophets and Messengers. Despite its extreme brevity, the address sums up the essence of the religion of Islam.



Two months after returning from his last pilgrimage, the Prophet fell ill. One day during this last illness, he addressed the people after having led the Prayer in the mosque:

“There is a slave among the slaves of God to whom God has offered the choice between this world and that which is with Him. And the slave has chosen that which is with God.”

When Abu Bakr, a close Companion of the Prophet, heard these words, he began to weep, for he understood that the Prophet was speaking of himself and the choice that he referred to was his own imminent death. The Prophet then continued:

“O people, the most beneficent of men unto me in companionship and generosity has been Abu Bakr. And if I were to select from all mankind an inseparable friend, he would be Abu Bakr. But real companionship and brotherhood is ours when God unites us all in His presence.”



During his last illness, the Prophet felt a little better one day and asked to be taken to the mosque. Ibn Abbas and Ali supported him from each side and, with his feet dragging on the ground, took him to the mosque. Abu Bakr had already started leading the Prayer. As Ibn Abbas and Ali took the Prophet to the front row, the people tried to give Abu Bakr a hint by clapping their hands. Abu Bakr, however, was too engrossed in the Prayer and did not take notice. Finally, he became aware of the Prophet's presence behind him and wanted to move back. The Prophet, however, indicated for him to continue leading the Prayer and asked Ibn Abbas and Ali to put him down next to Abu Bakr. The Prayer then continued in such a manner that Abu Bakr was following the Prophet seated next to him while the people behind were following Abu Bakr. After the Prayer was over, the Prophet asked Abu Bakr as to why he didn't continue leading the Prayer after he was asked to do so. Abu Bakr replied with his customary modesty:

"How dare the son of Abu Qahafa lead the Prayer in the presence of the Messenger of God?"



The Prophet never recovered from his last illness. On June 8, 632 C.E.—some three months after the Farewell Pilgrimage—the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> passed away from this world.

Nearing the actual moment of death, the very last words that repeatedly came to his lips were:

"Unto the Friend the Most High ...  
Unto the Friend the Most High..."



After the death of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, a young Muslim once inquired from an elder Muslim whether he had seen the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and whether he could describe his countenance to him. Hearing this, the elder Muslim began to weep, saying:

"Before accepting Islam, I opposed the Prophet and hated him so much that I would not even look at his face. Then, after accepting Islam, I was so ashamed of myself that I was unable to meet his look. Alas! I never saw

the face of the Prophet properly and cannot describe his countenance to you.”



An Arab poet, Hassan bin Thabit, penned this soulful verse after the death of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>:

“Thou wert the pupil of my eye; by thy death my eye has gone blind;  
Anyone may die now after thee; we were only afraid of thy death.”



Some twelve centuries after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, a French historian, Alphonse de Lamartine<sup>28</sup>, pays the ultimate tribute to the genius of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in his book, *Histoire de la Turqui*:

“If greatness of purpose, smallness of means and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man of modern history with Muhammad? ... Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images, the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?”



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<sup>28</sup> Alphonse Marie Louis de Prat de Lamartine (1790-1869) was a French writer, poet and politician. He was instrumental in the foundation of the Second Republic (the government of France between the 1848 Revolution and the 1851 coup by Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte).

## **Abu Bakr (572-634 C.E.)**

Extremely humble, soft-spoken, faithful, kind-hearted, honest, sincere, and conscientious; this was Abu Bakr. Even before accepting Islam he did not worship the idols and refrained from other evils prevalent in the Arab society of the day. A cloth merchant by profession, he was known among the people as *Al-Siddiq*, meaning the truthful one. Abu Bakr was among the first to accept Islam and was a long-time Companion of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. He helped greatly the cause of Islam through his financial sacrifices and participation in all the military campaigns. While his Caliphate lasted only two years, it set the standard for righteousness, competency, selfless devotion, austerity and responsible management.

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According to a story, Abu Bakr was taken to the Ka‘ba by his father when the former was just a child. After telling him to pray to the idols, the father left Abu Bakr alone. Abu Bakr is reported to have approached one idol and said, “O my god, I am in need of beautiful clothes. Bestow them upon me.” The idol, however, did not reply. Then Abu Bakr addressed another idol, saying: “O my god, give me delicious food. See that I am so hungry.” The idol remained unmoved. His patience having been exhausted by now, the young Abu Bakr picked up a stone and said to one idol, “Here I am aiming a stone at you; if you are a god, protect yourself.” Abu Bakr hurled the stone at the idol and left the Ka‘ba, never to return again for praying to the idols.<sup>29</sup>

●

Even before his conversion, Abu Bakr had great regard for the honesty and truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. One day Abu Bakr was returning back to his hometown, Mecca, when someone on the way informed him that Muhammad had declared himself to be a Prophet of God. Hearing this, Abu Bakr went straight to the Prophet’s house and asked him if it was true that he had made such a claim. The Prophet asked

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<sup>29</sup> Masud-ul Hasan, *Siddiq-I Akbar Hazrat Abu Bakr*, Feroz sons, Lahore

him to sit down and that he would explain his claim to him. Abu Bakr asked again if Muhammad had made such a claim. To this the Prophet replied, "Yes." At this, Abu Bakr said that he accepted his claim and would like to give his allegiance to the Prophet. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> once remarked that whenever he offered Islam to anyone, he showed some hesitation before accepting it; but Abu Bakr accepted it without showing any hesitation at all.

●

Abu Bakr had accompanied Muhammad on his travel to Syria when the monk Bahira had seen the sign of prophethood on Muhammad's forehead. Abu Bakr also used to speak to Waraqa bin Naufal about the coming of another prophet and was mentally prepared for such a possibility. He used to say:

"I had a premonition about the advent of the Prophet. Therefore, when the Apostle of God was sent, I believed in him and testified to his truth."

●

After his own acceptance of Islam, Abu Bakr was constantly active in conveying the message to others and was personally responsible for the conversion of several notable people including: 'Uthman bin Affan, Zubair bin Awwam, Talha bin Ubaidullah, Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf, Sa'd bin Abi Waqas, Abu Ubaidah, Abu Salma, Khalid bin Sa'id, and Abu Hudhaifah. Abu Bakr was also responsible for the conversion of Bilal al-Habashi and for setting him free from slavery. Abu Bakr is known to have purchased a total of eight slaves for the purpose of setting them free. Most of these were frail or infirm men and some were women. Once Abu Bakr's father, Abu Qahafa, said to him:

"Son, you are freeing old and weak persons; why don't you free healthy and strong persons who could be a source of strength to you?"

Abu Bakr replied that he was freeing the slaves for the sake of God and not for his own use.

●

When the opposition to Muslims reached its extreme in Mecca, the Prophet advised his followers to migrate to Medina, which they did in small numbers, not to raise an alarm. One day, Abu Bakr came to the

Prophet and asked permission for his own migration. The Prophet told him to wait as God may give him a companion.

When a plot was hatched by the Meccans to kill the Prophet himself, he left Mecca one night in the company of Abu Bakr. Initially, the two of them sought refuge in a nearby cave. It was during this stay in the cave that Abu Bakr earned his dearest title in life as “The second of the two in the cave,” referring to the Qur’anic verse 9:40<sup>30</sup>.



Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-1762) draws a picture of Abu Bakr and the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> seeking refuge in the Cave of Thaur when the radiant face of the Messenger of God rested in the lap of Abu Bakr. Shah Waliullah praises Abu Bakr in the following words: “O Abu Bakr! Your lap is like a desk and the radiant face of the blessed Prophet is like a manuscript of the Qur’an. O Abu Bakr! You are like the reciter who sits and reads the Qur’an.”



The Cave in which the two had taken refuge was small and Abu Bakr could actually see the feet of the Meccans outside who were searching for them. According to the account recorded by Anas bin Malik, a reporter of the Prophet’s Traditions, Abu Bakr said to his companion: “O Messenger of Allah! If one amongst them were to look from the level of his feet, he would surely see us.” At this, the Prophet replied: “Abu Bakr, what can befall two who have Allah as the third One with them.”



When the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and Abu Bakr escaped from Mecca accompanied by a guide, the news had already reached Medina and the people were eagerly awaiting their arrival. When the trio reached the outskirts of the city, they sat down on the ground to rest while the local populace gathered around, observing them with curiosity. Due to his better attire, the people mistook Abu Bakr to be the Prophet and looked at him

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<sup>30</sup> “If you help him not, then *know that* Allah helped him *even* when the disbelievers drove him forth while he was one of the two when they were both in the cave, when he said to his companion, ‘Grieve not, for Allah is with us.’ ....” (9:40)

with reverence. Realising their misunderstanding, Abu Bakr quietly stood up and held a piece of cloth above the Prophet's head, shading him from the sun. Only then did the people realise as to who was the Prophet and who the companion!

●

Being selected as the sole companion of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> during the latter's escape from Mecca conferred a great honour upon Abu Bakr. Referring to this incident, 'Umar often used to say this about Abu Bakr: "I wish all the deeds of my life were equal to his deed of that one day."

●

Once Ali asked his associates as to who was the bravest among the Muslims. All of them pointed to Ali himself. Ali then said:

"No. It is Abu Bakr. At the Battle of Badr, we had prepared a pavilion for the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. But when we were asked to guard it, none came forward except Abu Bakr. He guarded the Prophet with a bare sword, repelling all attacks that came that way."

●

It is narrated in the books of Traditions that Abu Bakr used to recite the Qur'an very quietly during his Prayers while 'Umar used to recite it very loudly. When the Prophet asked Abu Bakr as to why he recited it so quietly, Abu Bakr answered, "I am speaking to such a Person to Whom I can confide my secrets." When the Prophet asked 'Umar as to why he recited so loudly, 'Umar answered, "I intend to wake up the sleeping and drive away the Satan." Commenting on the above incident, Ali Hujwari, the noted Sufi mystic of the eleventh century, states in his book, *Kashful Mahjub*, that Abu Bakr's answer was the more elegant and superior.

●

Abu Bakr was very knowledgeable in the history of the Arabs, the genealogy of the Quraish and the interpretation of dreams. Before the Battle of Uhud, the Prophet saw in a dream that he was herding animals and some of them were being slaughtered. He also saw in the dream that the sword that he was holding had a piece broken off. When the Prophet asked Abu Bakr to interpret the dream, he deduced that the slaughter of

animals meant the death of many Muslims and the broken sword signified the death of the Prophet's own relatives. As the events unfolded, Abu Bakr was right on both points: many Muslims lost their lives and the Prophet's own uncle, Hamza, was killed.

●

Abu Bakr's son—Abdur Rahman—had fought against the Muslims in the Battle of Badr when he was still a disbeliever. Much later, when Abdur Rahman had accepted Islam, he told his father that he had an opportunity to strike him during the battle but had turned in another direction. Hearing this, Abu Bakr replied:

“If I had such an opportunity, I would not have spared you.”

●

In the Battle of Uhud, Abu Bakr's son, Abdur Rahman, was still a disbeliever and fought alongside the Meccans against the Muslims. Before an all-out fighting broke out, Abdur Rahman entered the battle field and challenged any Muslim to come forward and meet him in one-on-one combat. Abu Bakr immediately stood up to take on the challenge of his own son. At this, the Prophet placed his hand on Abu Bakr's arm and said:

“Sheath your sword and let us continue to profit by your wise counsels!”

●

When negotiations were being carried out during the Treaty of Hudaibiya, a spokesman of the Quraish was touching the beard of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> now and then. Not being able to withstand such disrespect for his master, Abu Bakr took out his sword and addressed the offender: “If that hand touches the beard of the Prophet once again, it will not be allowed to go back.”

●

After the signing of the Treaty of Hudaibiya in 628 C.E., ‘Umar had become visibly angry at the unfavourable terms to which the Prophet had agreed. He had questioned the Prophet with somewhat direct and pointed words. At the time, Abu Bakr admonished ‘Umar with the words, “‘Umar, hold yourself in check and do not let your grip on the stirrup of the



Messenger of Allah be loosened. By God, he to whom we have sworn allegiance is certainly true.”



Abu Bakr was one of the most trusted and faithful companions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Not only did he take part in all military campaigns, but also helped the cause of Islam with generous financial sacrifices. In this respect, many companions of the Prophet vied with one another in taking the lead. In 630 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> made an appeal for funds in preparation for the Campaign of Tabuk. ‘Umar, another close companion of the Prophet, brought half of his household belongings and offered them to the Prophet. ‘Umar thought that this time he would out-do the “old man”. When Abu Bakr brought some household belongings and offered them for the cause, the Prophet asked him if he had left anything behind in his house. To this, Abu Bakr replied:

“Only the name of God and His Messenger.”

On hearing this ‘Umar remarked, “None can surpass Abu Bakr in serving the cause of Islam.”

In the twentieth century, an Indian Urdu poet, Iqbal, encapsulated Abu Bakr’s historic response in one of his own verses:

“For the moth the lamp and for the nightingale the flower;  
For Siddiq, God and His Prophet suffice.”



One time the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> praised someone in the presence of ‘Umar and Abu Bakr. ‘Umar thought that it will be great if he went and advised the person of these words of praise coming from the Prophet’s mouth. However, when ‘Umar visited the person, he learned that Abu Bakr had already been there and had conveyed the good news to the man. At this ‘Umar exclaimed, “By God, I have never yet beaten Abu Bakr in the doing of any good.”



The Prophet once remarked:

“I have paid back the obligations of all except that of Abu Bakr who will have his reward on the Day of Judgment.”



Just before his own demise, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> made this remark to his followers:

“O people, the most beneficent of men unto me in companionship and generosity has been Abu Bakr. And if I were to select from all mankind an inseparable friend, he would be Abu Bakr...”



When the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> passed away in 632 C.E., both Abu Bakr and Ali were not immediately present. When ‘Umar bin Khattab heard the news, he went to the Prophet’s house, took out his sword, and declared that he will sever the head of anyone who said that the Prophet had died. Meantime, the news reached Abu Bakr who went inside the house, kissed the Prophet’s forehead and, coming outside, made his now historic utterance to the people:

“Whoever worshipped Muhammad let them know that Muhammad is dead, and whoever worshipped God, let them know that God is alive and never dies.”

Then Abu Bakr recited the following verse from the Qur’an:

“And Muhammad is only a Messenger. Verily, Messengers have passed away before him. If then he die or be slain, will you turn back on your heels?” (3:145)

When ‘Umar heard these words, he finally realised that the Prophet had indeed passed away and fell down on his knees stricken with grief.



After being elected the First Khalifa of the Muslims, Abu Bakr addressed the people in the following words:

“By God, I have never wished for Khilafat, nor felt any greed for it, nor asked God for it, nor does it give me any pleasure...”

“Brothers! Now I am elected your Amir, although I am no better than anyone among you. Help me if I am in the right and set me right if I am in the

wrong... The weak among you will be strong with me till—God willing—his right has been vindicated. And the strong among you shall be weak with me till—if God will—I have taken what is due from him. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Prophet. If I disobey Him and His Prophet, obey me not.”<sup>31</sup>

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The lifestyle of Abu Bakr was simple, frugal and austere. Before becoming the Khalifa, Abu Bakr used to milk the goats of his tribesmen. One day, soon after obtaining his new position, Abu Bakr overheard a girl saying:

“Now that he has become the Khalifa, he will not milk our goats.”

To this he replied immediately, “No, my daughter, I shall certainly milk the goats as usual. By the grace of God, my position will not change my routine.”

●

The borders of Arabia were being threatened by hostile activities by the Sassanid and Byzantine forces. The Prophet had prepared an army for this purpose but it was never dispatched due to his own illness. At the same time, some false prophets had risen who were rebelling and wanted a share in the Muslims’ dominion over the land of Arabia. Some of the elders among the Muslims suggested that Medina was vulnerable and that the army should be kept in the city for its own defence. At this, Abu Bakr declared:

“Who am I to withhold the army that the Messenger of God had ordained to proceed? Come what may: let Medina stand or fall, the Caliphate live or perish, the command of the Messenger of God shall be carried out.”<sup>32</sup>

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When the people realised that Abu Bakr was bent upon dispatching the army, they suggested that the command of the army should be taken away

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<sup>31</sup> Jamil Ahmad, *Hundred Great Muslims*, Feroz Sons Limited, Pakistan 1984.

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Rajih Jad'an, *Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq*

from the young Usama bin Zaid and given to some capable veteran with experience. The people persuaded ‘Umar to make the case in front of Abu Bakr. After listening to ‘Umar, Abu Bakr said:

“‘Umar, Usama was appointed by the Messenger of God and you want me to veto the appointment made by him. Does it suit you to make such a recommendation? How can I, as the Caliph of the Messenger of God, cancel an order made by him after due consideration.”<sup>33</sup>

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On the eve of sending the army on its way, Abu Bakr gave some advice:

“I advise you to do the following things: Do not kill women or children or the aged. Do not cut down fruit bearing trees. Do not destroy an inhabited place. Do not slaughter sheep or camels except for food. Do not burn bees and do not scatter them. Do not steal from the booty. And do not be cowardly.”

●

Abu Bakr, much like his master the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, was totally averse to any flattery or praise. Whenever someone would praise him on his face, he would say, “O God, you know me more than myself and I know myself more than these people know. Pray forgive my sins that they do not know and hold me not responsible for their praise.”

●

Abu Bakr was an extremely wise person and there are many a word of wisdom and insights attributed to him. Following is a very sagacious utterance of his on the subject of achieving knowledge of God:

“Glory be to God who has not given to his creatures any way to attain knowledge of Him except by means of their helplessness and their hopelessness of ever reaching such attainment.”

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<sup>33</sup> Muhammad Rajih Jad'an, *Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq*

Abu Bakr exercised great care and scruples in the spending of money from the Public Treasury, which also provided his monthly stipend. He used to withdraw the least amount that would support a very frugal living standard for him and his family. Once his wife asked him for some sweets, which he could not purchase for lack of spare funds. His wife began to meticulously save some money each day and in a couple of weeks gave it to Abu Bakr to purchase the sweets. Abu Bakr immediately returned the money to the Public Treasury on the ground that he was obviously drawing in excess of what was required. As well, he reduced his monthly allowance for the future!



One day after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, Abu Bakr said to ‘Umar, “Let us go and visit Umm Aiman as the Messenger of Allah used to visit her.”

Called by the Prophet as “a woman from Paradise”, Umm Aiman was the lady to whom the young six-year old Muhammad was entrusted immediately after the death of his mother, Amina. Originating from Abyssinia, Umm Aiman was a slave of the Prophet’s parents whom he freed after his marriage to Khadija. The Prophet respected her greatly and used to say of her, “Umm Aiman mothered me after my mother.” He always addressed her as “mother”.

When Abu Bakr and ‘Umar came to see Umm Aiman, she began to weep. They asked her, “What makes you weep? Do you not know that what Allah has in store for His Messenger is better than this worldly life?”

She said, “I weep not because I am ignorant of the fact that what is in store for the Messenger of Allah is better than this world, but I weep because the Revelation has ceased to come.”

This moved both Abu Bakr and ‘Umar to tears and they began to weep along with her.



Nearing his death, Abu Bakr inquired from the Public Treasury as to the money that he had withdrawn as his stipend. On learning the amount, he instructed that a plot of ground that he owned be sold immediately and that the entire sum of the stipend be paid back to the Public Treasury.

Upon his death, Abu Bakr left behind just one camel and a piece of cloth which, according to his will, were handed over to his Successor for public use. When these items were presented to ‘Umar after the death of Abu Bakr, he is reported to have burst into tears and remarked:

“Abu Bakr! You have made the task of your successor very difficult!”



When he was on his deathbed, Abu Bakr advised his family that the two pieces of the cloth that he was wearing should be washed and used for his coffin. His daughter, ‘A’isha, remarked somewhat testily that they were not so poor as to ill afford the purchase of even the coffin cloth for their father. To this Abu Bakr replied, “The new pieces of cloth can be better utilised for the living than for the dead.”



## **‘Umar bin Khattab (586-644 C.E.)**

Tall, well-built, athletic, and a great orator, ‘Umar bin Khattab cut an impressive figure among the pre-Islamic polytheist tribesmen of Quraish. Initially he opposed the spread of Islam by the Holy Prophet<sup>pbuh</sup> whom he accused of splitting the unity of the tribe. However, in the sixth year of the Prophet’s mission, ‘Umar accepted Islam and became one of its greatest supporters. After the death of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar became the Second Successor and remained so for ten years. The Islamic state gained its maximum extension during his Caliphate and many significant reforms in establishing state apparatus and departments were implemented during his rule. Having a rather harsh and stern temperament in his early life, he mellowed considerably after being appointed the Khalifa.



One day, before he accepted Islam, ‘Umar decided to end the spread of the new faith and the resulting division that it was causing among the Arabs. With sword in hand, ‘Umar went out seeking the Prophet Muhammad. On his way he met a person who, after learning of ‘Umar’s intention, told him to first put his own house in order as his sister and brother-in-law had both accepted Islam. Surprised at this news, ‘Umar went directly to his sister’s house where he found his sister and brother-in-law, Sa‘id bin Zaid, reciting verses of the Qur’an. Observing this scene, ‘Umar flew into a rage and began quarrelling with his brother-in-law. His sister came to her husband’s defence but ‘Umar hit her as well and she fell down bleeding from her face. Seeing this, ‘Umar calmed down a little and after some reflection, asked them to give him what they were reading. ‘Umar’s sister asked him to first perform the ablution before she would hand over the parchment to him. Reading the verses from Surah *Ta-Ha*, brought a surprising change in ‘Umar. He immediately stood up and went out looking for the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, this time to announce his own acceptance of the faith and to give him his full allegiance.



Before ‘Umar’s conversion, Muslims used to meet secretly in homes and never dared to say their Prayers at the Sacred Mosque for fear of

public hostility. One day ‘Umar and Hamza took the Muslims to the Ka‘ba in two groups and, to the bewilderment and chagrin of the Quraish nobility, performed their Prayers openly at the site.

●

‘Umar was a very brave, courageous and fearless person. It is narrated by Ali that everyone migrated to Medina secretly except ‘Umar. When he decided to migrate, he strapped on his sword, slung his bow over his shoulder and with arrows in hand, came to the Ka‘ba where he performed his circuits and said his Prayer. Then he approached the group of leading Quraish nobles gathered near the Ka‘ba and said:

“Whoever wishes to bereave his mother, orphan his children and make his wife a widow, then let him meet me behind this valley.”

No one accepted the offer and ‘Umar migrated to Medina accompanied by his brother-in-law, Sa‘id bin Zaid.

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After the Treaty of Hudaibiya was signed in 628 C.E., ‘Umar became visibly angry at the unfavourable terms to which the Prophet had acquiesced. He had questioned the Prophet in very direct and somewhat insolent language. At the time, Abu Bakr had admonished ‘Umar with the words, “‘Umar, hold yourself in check and do not let your grip on the stirrup of the Messenger of Allah be loosened. By God, he to whom we have sworn allegiance is certainly true.”

Later in his life ‘Umar used to narrate that he was carried away in his momentary excitement and was always ashamed for this rash act of his. He said that he sought to wash out this stain of weakness through constant prayer, fasting, almsgiving and the freeing of slaves.

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In 634 C.E., after being nominated Successor to Abu Bakr, ‘Umar concluded his inaugural address to the people by saying:

“If I follow the right path, follow me. If I deviate from the right path, correct me so that we are not led astray.”

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After becoming Khalifa, it was common practice for ‘Umar to walk the streets of Medina incognito at night. One night, ‘Umar heard some



children crying in a house. Upon asking the woman he learned that they had nothing to eat and that she was cooking some stones in a pot to give the impression to the children that food was being prepared. At this, ‘Umar went to the Public Treasury and took a sack of grain on his own back to deliver to the family. When an assistant offered to carry the sack himself, ‘Umar is said to have responded:

“Would you also be willing to carry the load of my sins on the Day of Judgment?”



During the Caliphate of ‘Umar, the two mighty empires of the Sassanids and the Byzantines were defeated and the Muslim rule was extended from Libya in the west to the Indus and Oxus<sup>34</sup> Rivers in the east. Yet, ‘Umar himself led an extremely simple and unpretentious life. One time a delegation from the Eastern Roman Empire came to visit the Caliph in Medina. On arrival, they asked a local person for the location of the Caliph’s palace. Surprised at the question, the person promptly took the delegation to the local mosque where the Caliph was lying down on the bare floor.



In the second year of ‘Umar’s Caliphate in the year 636 C.E., the Muslim army laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. After six months into the siege, the Christian Patriarch Sophonius agreed to a peace treaty if the Caliph would come and sign it himself. In 637 C.E., ‘Umar travelled from Medina to Jerusalem in the company of a slave. They took turns riding the single camel that they shared for this purpose. The Patriarch and the citizenry of Jerusalem were stunned to see the Caliph entering the city on foot holding the camel’s rein while the slave rode on top.



During ‘Umar’s visit to Jerusalem, the Patriarch Sophonius offered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to ‘Umar for saying his Prayer. This was

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<sup>34</sup> Oxus River (or Amu Darya) is a major waterway in Central Asia. It is formed by the junction of Vakhsh and Panj Rivers and flows into Aral Sea. In ancient times, Oxus River was regarded as the boundary between Greater Iran and Turan (land of the Turks).

meant to repay for a similar gesture made by the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> to a Christian delegation from Najran that was visiting Medina. ‘Umar, however, declined the offer, fearing that the Muslims may turn the Christian church into their own mosque one day. Instead, ‘Umar said his Prayer outside in the courtyard. True to ‘Umar’s fears, the Muslims built a mosque at the exact place where he said his Prayer. The structure is known today as the Mosque of ‘Umar al-Faruq<sup>35</sup> in Jerusalem.

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‘Umar’s lifestyle, in line with his predecessors—Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and Abu Bakr—was extremely modest and humble. At the same time, he had an acute sense of responsibility for the care and maintenance of his subjects. Once the governor of Kufa visited ‘Umar and observed him eating simple barley bread with olive oil. He asked why the Caliph didn’t eat wheat bread which was produced in plenty in the land. ‘Umar replied: “Do you think that wheat is available to every single individual living in my vast dominion?”

Saeed Mohtsham, a researcher in Islamic studies, writes in his paper: *Vision and Visionary Leadership—An Islamic Perspective*, that ‘Umar used to say:

“If a dog dies hungry on the banks of the River Euphrates, ‘Umar will be responsible for dereliction of duty.”

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‘Umar was strict in the enforcement of justice and fully conscious of remaining impartial. Jablah bin Aiham was a Ghassanid (Syrian) chieftain who led his forces alongside those of Heraclius against the Muslim army in the Battle of Yarmuk in 636 C.E. After the victory by the Muslims, Jablah accepted Islam. Once when Jablah bin Aiham was performing his pilgrimage at the Ka’ba, a poor Bedouin unintentionally stepped on his gown. Jablah slapped him on the face but was surprised to receive a

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<sup>35</sup> The Mosque of Umar in Jerusalem is different from the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque (Farthest Mosque) and the Dome of the Rock. *Masjidi Aqsa* is located at the site of the ancient Temple of Solomon while the Dome of the Rock mosque was built by the Umayyad Caliph, ‘Umar bin Abdul Aziz.

similar slap in return from the Bedouin. Jablah hastened to the presence of ‘Umar and complained about this ill treatment, saying: “Had he done such an insult to me in my own country, he would be hanged.”

The Caliph heard his complaint and replied calmly, “Such was the practice here, too, in pre-Islamic days. But now the beggar and the prince are equal in Islam.”



One day, Abu Sufyan and Suhail bin Amr were waiting to see ‘Umar. Both had accepted Islam after the Conquest of Mecca. Meantime, Bilal also came to see the Caliph and was asked to go in first. At this, Abu Sufyan became visibly upset and exclaimed:

“I was saved to experience such humiliation that an ex-slave should be admitted to see the Khalifa before me.”

To this, Suhail bin Amr replied, “Then whose fault is this? The Messenger of God called all of us to God. These people responded to his call immediately but we held back. Then why shouldn’t they have priority over us?”



Once ‘Umar was perusing the Jewish holy book, the Torah, when the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> remarked:

“You are too casual with that book. If you want to gain any value from it, you will have to become a Jew. To be a perfect Jew is better than to be an incomplete Muslim; and dallying with the Jewish book is half-hearted and will give you no benefit one way or the other.

“Your mistake is that you are neither one thing nor another in behaving in this manner. You do not believe, nor do you disbelieve.”<sup>36</sup>



Khurasan was the largest province of the Sassanid Empire covering north-eastern Iran, north-western Afghanistan, and southern Turkmenistan. Its capital was Balkh (Bactra). The task of conquering this area was assigned by ‘Umar to Al-Ahnaf bin Qais. When in 643 C.E. Al-

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<sup>36</sup> Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*, p 73, Penguin Group publication, 1990

Ahnaf wrote to ‘Umar about having conquered Khurasan, ‘Umar addressed the Muslims in Medina in the following words:

“Allah has defeated the King of the Magians<sup>37</sup>... And Allah has granted you the governance of their lands to see how you execute His commands. So, be dutiful to your Lord, and do not change your religion, for by Allah, if you do, He will replace you with others who will defend the Faith. Verily, I fear for this *Ummah* nothing but its own evil.”

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The great Muslim historian, At-Tabari (839-923 C.E), reports of a conversation that ‘Umar had with Salman al-Farsi which shows the genuine fear of God the great Khalifa had in his heart. ‘Umar once asked Salman:

“Am I a King or a Khalifa?”

To this, Salman replied, “If you have collected a tax of even one dirham from the people and applied it unlawfully, you are a King, not a Khalifa.”

On hearing this ‘Umar is reported to have wept.

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In 644 C.E., while leading the Prayer, ‘Umar was stabbed by a slave to exact his personal revenge. When ‘Umar was dying, he said to his son, Abdullah:

“Go to ‘A’isha and tell her that ‘Umar is paying his salutation to her. But do not say ‘The chief of the believers’ because today I am not the chief of the believers. And say that ‘Umar bin Khattab wants the permission to be buried with his two companions (the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and Abu Bakr)”<sup>38</sup>.

Abdullah greeted ‘A’isha who was weeping at ‘Umar’s stabbing and mentioned ‘Umar’s request.

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<sup>37</sup> Magians is a term of Hellenistic (Greek) origin that refers to the Zoroastrians.

<sup>38</sup> When the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> died, he was buried at the same place where he had breathed his last, in the small room of A’isha. Later on, Abu Bakr was also buried in that room, below the shoulder of the Prophet.

She said, “I had the idea of having this place for myself, but today I prefer ‘Umar to myself.”

‘Umar was buried next to Abu Bakr, both lying below the shoulders of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. This fulfilled a dream of ‘A’isha in which she saw three moons falling, one after the other, in her chamber.



When ‘Umar lay on his deathbed, someone suggested that he nominate his own son, Abdullah, as the next Khalifa. ‘Umar replied in anger:

“May God curse you for tempting me to nepotism by nominating my own son, when I am about to meet my Creator. The Caliphate is an affair affecting the entire Muslim community and I would not like to make it a hereditary affair in my family...”

## **‘Uthman bin Affan (574-656 C.E.)**

Belonging to the Banu Umaiyad branch of the Quraish, ‘Uthman has been described as handsome with a very charming personality. He was known for his piety, honesty and integrity. Even during the period of *Jahiliyya* (Ignorance), he shunned evil and led a righteous life. He had inherited a small fortune from his father and became a leading businessman in Hijaz before his conversion to Islam. After conversion, he fought alongside the Muslims in many battles and made considerable financial contributions for the cause. Elected to the office upon the death of ‘Umar in 644 C.E., ‘Uthman’s Caliphate lasted about twelve years. He is credited with compiling the final authoritative text of the Qur’an and circulating this standardised version in the Islamic lands. Being independently wealthy, he never withdrew any sum from the Public Treasury for his own upkeep. The later part of ‘Uthman’s Caliphate suffered from some of the worst insurgencies by political opportunists that eventually led to the Caliph’s murder.



In the very early days of the Prophet’s mission, Abu Bakr told ‘Uthman of the Prophet’s message which he accepted readily and was the fourth person to have embraced the new faith. He said to the Prophet:

“O Messenger of Allah, I have come recently from Syria. When we were between Ma’an and al-Zarqa, I was about to sleep when I heard a voice calling: ‘O sleepers, get up, for Ahmad has emerged in Mecca.’ Then we came here and heard about you.”<sup>39</sup>



‘Uthman had the honour of marrying two daughters of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, one after another. When Utbah bin Abu Lahab divorced Ruqayya, the second daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Uthman married her. However, she fell ill and passed away in 624 C.E., when the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *At-Tabaqat*

Prophet was fighting in the Battle of Badr. Seeing ‘Uthman visibly distressed at the death of his wife, ‘Umar met him and dropped some hints that his own daughter, Hafsa, was available for marriage. ‘Uthman, however, declined saying that he was too upset to think of another marriage. ‘Umar felt offended and went and complained to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> about ‘Uthman’s behaviour. The Prophet remarked:

“‘Umar, do not worry. Hafsa may get a better husband than ‘Uthman, and ‘Uthman may get a better wife than Hafsa.”

In 625 C.E., Hafsa was married to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, and ‘Uthman was married to Umm Kulthum, the third daughter of the Prophet.



The third daughter of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, Umm Kulthum, had been engaged at an early age to Utaibah, another son of Abu Lahab. After the Prophet declared his mission, Abu Lahab pressured his son to break off the engagement. At the time of her marriage to ‘Uthman, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> said to Umm Kulthum:

“Verily, your husband resembles most your forefather Abraham, and your father Muhammad.”

The marriage, however, lasted only six years and Umm Kulthum passed away in 631 C.E. soon after the Conquest of Mecca. ‘Uthman was extremely distressed at her death and walked around broken hearted with obvious signs of grief on his face. Seeing this, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> consoled him by saying: “O ‘Uthman, if we had a third one, we would give her in marriage to you.”<sup>40</sup>



The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> used to say: “The most compassionate of my *Ummah* is Abu Bakr, the strictest in adherence to religion is ‘Umar, the most sincere in modesty is ‘Uthman...”



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<sup>40</sup> By this time the Prophet’s third daughter, Fatima, had already been married to Ali bin Abu Talib.

Once the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was lying down at home and a portion of his leg was uncovered. ‘Umar came in to consult the Prophet on some matter and the Prophet remained in that condition. Then Abu Bakr came in to see the Prophet and the latter remained in the same condition. Then when ‘Uthman was about to come in, the Prophet covered his leg before seeing him. Later when ‘A’isha asked the Prophet for his action, he replied that he was well aware of the extreme sense of modesty and propriety of ‘Uthman.

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When ‘Umar was dying, he nominated a committee of six persons to elect the next Khalifa. These included: Ali, ‘Uthman, Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf, Sa’d bin Abi Waqas, Zubair bin Awwam, and Talha bin Ubaidullah. After mutual discussions and consultations with other Muslim elders, the committee decided upon ‘Uthman bin Affan as successor to ‘Umar.

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In his inaugural address, ‘Uthman talked about the transient nature of this world and urged the people to do good deeds. He said that he was aware of his own limitations but would do his best to serve Islam and the people. Then, overwhelmed with emotion, he broke down and cut short his address by saying:

“O people, it is not easy to manage a new horse. If God willing I live, there will be several other occasions to talk to you. Right now I cannot speak; you know that I am not good at making public speeches.”

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On a later date, ‘Uthman addressed the people as follows:

“Know that whatever you have attained is due to Islam and following the injunctions of the Messenger of God. If you are lost in the world, you will betray the objective of your life. Follow Islam faithfully and do not introduce any innovation therein. See that the abundance of wealth does not divert you from the ideals of Islam. The expansion of your dominion has brought various peoples within its fold. See that this does not lead to any differences among you. Remain united. Hold fast to the rope of God. May God bless you.”

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In one of his sermons, ‘Uthman outlined to the people his role as the Khalifa:

“My role is to follow what has already been laid down. I do not intend to be an innovator. I declare that I will faithfully follow the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*. In matters not covered by the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*, I promise to follow the consensus before me. If no consensus has been reached already in a certain matter, then I will follow the right way in consultation with you. I assure you that I will restrain my hand from you, till that is the dictate of the law.”

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Once during his Caliphate there was a severe drought and people began selling their valuables and possessions cheaply to survive. ‘Uthman was told that a certain orchard was being sold very cheaply and that he should buy it. While on his way to purchase the orchard, ‘Uthman came across many who were poverty stricken and starving. Seeing this, he was greatly distressed and distributed the entire sum among the people. On returning home, he was asked whether he had purchased the orchard. He replied, “Yes, in Paradise.”

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The first six years of ‘Uthman’s Caliphate went smoothly without any serious incident. Then the instigators, who intended to weaken the Muslim rule from within, started levelling various accusations against the Caliph. He was accused of nepotism for appointing Umaiyad family members to high positions; he was blamed for improperly collecting wealth; and he was faulted with burning non-standard copies of the Holy Qur’an. The fact that the Caliph provided proper explanations for all accusations did not seem to matter.

The well known Muslim historian, Tabari (839-923 C.E.), gives the following quote from the Caliph’s address to the people:

“When the reins of the government were entrusted to me, I was the largest owner of camels and goats in Arabia. Today, I possess neither a goat nor a camel save two, which are meant for the pilgrimage. By God I have taxed no city beyond its capacity so that such a thing might be imputed to me. And

whatever I have taken from the people I have spent on their own welfare. Only a fifth of it comes to me (in the Public Treasury). Out of this, too, I consider nothing for my personal use. This is spent on the deserving people, not by me, but by Muslims themselves, and not a dirham of public funds is misappropriated. I take nothing out of it, so that even what I eat is out of my own earnings.”<sup>41</sup>

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In 656 C.E., the insurgents besieged Medina. The citizens of the city who wanted to defend ‘Uthman were prevented by the Caliph from doing so for fear of shedding Muslim blood. When things heated up to an extreme point, the Caliph addressed the rebels in the following words:

“As to death, I have no fear of it and I consider it the easiest thing. As to fighting, if I wished such a thing, thousands would have come forward to fight for me. But I cannot be the cause of shedding a drop of Muslim blood.”<sup>42</sup>

In these turbulent days, ‘Uthman prayed to God as follows: “I ask Allah for forgiveness if I have done wrong, and I have already forgiven if I have been wronged by others.”

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During the days of rioting, ‘Uthman confided to Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, a leading scholar of the time, “These people are demanding that I resign or they would kill me.”

Ibn ‘Umar said, “Are you immortal? Can these people do anything more than killing you?”

When ‘Uthman replied with a “No,” Ibn ‘Umar asked him, “Can they determine whether you go to heaven or hell?”

Again, ‘Uthman replied in the negative. Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar said, “Then do not take off a garment God has given you, so that you do not set

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<sup>41</sup> Ahmad, Jamil, *Hundred Great Muslims*, Feroz Sons Limited, Pakistan 1984.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmad, Jamil, *Hundred Great Muslims*, Feroz Sons Limited, Pakistan 1984.

a precedent allowing any group of people to remove their ruler or kill him whenever they disliked him.”



Eventually, the insurgents found an opportune time when many of the city's residents had gone for the pilgrimage. They gathered around 'Uthman's house and besieged him. At one point, Ali's older son, Hasan, entered 'Uthman's house and addressed him, "O leader of the faithful! You are on the right. But without your order, I cannot draw my sword against the Muslims. So, please order me so that I can remove this evil from you." At this 'Uthman answered, "O the son of my brother! Please go back to your own home until such time that God sends down his command. We do not need to shed any blood."

It is reported that just before the insurgents stormed his house, 'Uthman issued this order: "I command everyone here who believes that he should obey my orders to stay his hand and to put down his weapon." Then 'Uthman asked Abdullah ibn 'Umar to go outside and inform the people of his order.

Despite the fact that Ali had appointed his two sons, Hasan and Husain, to guard the Caliph's residence, the insurgents climbed over the walls and entered the house. 'Uthman was keeping the fast that day. The previous night he had seen the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in a dream who had said to him, "'Uthman, break your fast with us this evening. We will welcome you." That indicated to 'Uthman that it was his last fast. He sat in a room reading the Qur'an with his wife beside him when the rebels entered and attacked him. His own wife was wounded when she tried to defend her husband.



It is narrated in the Traditions that one day the Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr and 'Uthman were on Mount Uhud when it was shaken by an earthquake. The Prophet struck the mountain with his foot and said, "Be still, for there is no one on you but a Prophet, a *Siddiq*, and a martyr."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Reported in *Sahih Muslim*.

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Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar narrates that once the Prophet mentioned some imminent turmoil that was going to befall the Muslims and a man passed by who was covering his head. The Prophet remarked: “The one who is covering his head will be killed unlawfully on that day.”

Ibn ‘Umar says that he looked and saw that it was ‘Uthman bin Affan.

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When the Prophet was still alive, he once said to ‘Uthman, “O ‘Uthman! It may be that Allah shall vest you with a garment to wear. If the hypocrites want you to shed it, do not remove it until you meet me.”

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‘Uthman once narrated: “The Prophet took a covenant from me (not to fight at the time of my martyrdom) and I shall fulfil it.”

‘A’isha narrates that once the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> sent for ‘Uthman and conversed with him, and ‘Uthman’s colour changed. She further states that when he was besieged in his house, she said:

“O leader of the faithful, will you not fight?”

He said, “No. The Messenger of Allah gave me some advice and I am going to persevere with it.”

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‘Uthman bin Affan used to say: “If I were between Paradise and the Fire, not knowing where I will be sent, I would choose to be turned into ash before finding out where I was bound.”

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It is related on the authority of Anas bin Malik (612-709) that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> said:

“Verily, the Lord has a sword sheathed in a scabbard as long as ‘Uthman is alive. When ‘Uthman is slain, that sword shall be drawn and will not be sheathed until the Day of Resurrection.”

## **Ali bin Abu Talib (599-661 C.E.)**

Being the son of the Prophet's uncle Abu Talib, Ali accepted Islam at an early age of eleven. Of all the Companions of the Prophet, Ali perhaps possessed the most balanced personality. He was a formidable warrior, a very learned intellectual, an astute advisor, and a very pious and unpretentious person.

The great piety and high intellectualism of Ali is attributed to close association with the Prophet and his personal supervision of him. He is also universally regarded as the father of Islamic mysticism. His bravery is legendary and his counsel was sought after by all, including the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. 'Umar used to say this about him:

“God forbid that we may be confronted with some controversial issue which Ali might not be able to solve.”

When Ali took on the mantle of Khilafat in 656 C.E., the condition of the Islamic empire was extremely critical. The public was demanding justice for the killers of 'Uthman and many were questioning the legitimacy of Ali's election to the office. Much of the physical power resided not with the Khalifa but with the rebels and with the governors of other territories. Ali's attempt to fix the problem eventually led to a civil war in which many Muslim lives were lost on both sides.



Ali was noted for his chivalry, courage and formidable fighting skills. He won his one-on-one combat against Walid bin Utbah in the Battle of Badr. In the Battle of Uhud, Ali won his one-on-one combat against Talha, the standard bearer of the Meccan forces. In the Battle of the Ditch, Ali took on the challenge of Amru bin Abd-Wudd, who had managed to jump across the ditch, and promptly dispatched him. In the Battle of Khaibar, the Muslims had besieged the several fortresses there but could not succeed against the main fortress of al-Qamus. One morning, the Prophet assigned the command of the Muslims to Ali but told him to offer the people Islam before undertaking any fighting. The inmates of al-Qamus refused the offer. The Muslims under Ali's command managed to breach the strong fortification and brought victory.



One day, after the Battle of Badr, Ali came to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and sat down shyly without saying a word. After some time, the Prophet realised Ali's dilemma, and initiated the subject himself by asking if he had come to ask for the hand of Fatima, his daughter. To this Ali nodded. The Prophet told him that he would reply after consultation with Fatima. Later, after assenting to Ali's proposal, the Prophet asked him if he had any money for the wedding expenses to which Ali responded in the negative. The Prophet then suggested that Ali should sell his shield and use the proceeds for this purpose. Ali agreed and sold his shield to 'Uthman. When the latter learned of the reason why Ali had sold his shield, he returned it to Ali as a wedding gift saying:

"It would be more useful for a warrior like you than for a trader like me."



In the Battle of Uhud, Ali received many wounds. Despite this, he continued to fight. Later on, he remarked:

"It is a favour of God that he gave me the courage to stand and fight, and not leave the battlefield. May God grant me patience to bear this suffering."



It was Ali's habit to step into the battlefield riding a mule. Once people asked him as to why he didn't ride a horse which could run faster. Ali responded that it was so because he didn't wish to fly away from the battlefield. It was the same philosophy that prompted Ali to wear the armour only on his front side as he never intended to turn his back to the enemy.



Ali was well regarded for his advice which was sought by the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and all the three Caliphs preceding Ali. He was also noted for rendering good judgments and acted as a *Qadhi* (judge) during the time of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and the Caliphates of Abu Bakr and 'Umar.

Once, after ascending to the Caliphate, Ali was wrongfully charged by a man for taking his armour while Ali in fact had duly purchased it from

him. Ali was summoned to the court of the *Qadhi* in Medina which was packed by people. Ali came to the court and stood by the side of the plaintiff, without any regard for his own position among the Muslims. The claimant produced several false witnesses to support his own claim. The *Qadhi* asked Ali if he wanted to say anything in his own defence to which Ali replied in the negative. The *Qadhi* decided the case in favour of the claimant and awarded the armour to him. The claimant was taken aback by this impartial judgment and returned the armour to Ali, saying that he had validly purchased it. The claimant said that he had filed the case against Ali simply to test the impartiality of the Caliph and his courts.

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Once, someone asked Ali if he had ever seen God. Ali replied that he never believed in something that he could not see! When prompted further as to how he saw God, Ali said, "With the inward eyes of the heart."

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It is narrated in the Traditions according to Bukhari that one day Ali's son, Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya, asked his father:

"Who is the best person after God's Messenger?"

Ali replied, "Abu Bakr." His son asked, "Who then?"

Ali replied, "Then 'Umar."

Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya narrates that he was afraid to ask him as to 'who next', because he thought his father would say, 'Uthman. So, instead, he volunteered by asking instead, "Then you?"

At this Ali said, "I am only an ordinary person."

●

One day, a hypocrite started praising Ali profusely, although he carried no respect for him in his heart. Hearing the praise, Ali said to him:

"I am less than what you tell about me but more than what you think about me."

●

Once, while addressing the people, Ali said:

"There are two things in this world that soften the wrath of Allah and prevent its descent upon man. One has been taken away from you; hold fast to the

other. The one that has been taken away from men is the Holy Prophet. The one that still remains with them is repentance and atonement for sins. God says in the Holy Book that he would not punish the people while the Prophet was among them nor while they were asking for forgiveness.”<sup>44</sup>

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Ali is reported to have said:

“There are people who worship Allah to gain His Favours; this is the worship of traders. There are some who worship Him to keep themselves free of His wrath; this is the worship of slaves. There are a few who worship Him out of their sense of gratitude and obligations; this is the worship of free and noble men.”<sup>45</sup>

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At another time Ali remarked:

“The sin which makes you sad and repentant is more liked by Allah than the good deed which turns you arrogant.”<sup>46</sup>

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Once Ali called his slave but he did not respond to his call. He called him several times but the slave remained silent. Ali then went to the slave and asked him as to why he did not respond to his repeated calls. The slave answered, “I heard your calls but I was myself calling upon God asking Him why He had subjected me to the humiliation of slavery.” Hearing this, Ali immediately released him from his slavery in the name of God.

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<sup>44</sup> Surah *Anfal*, 8:34: “But Allah would not punish them while thou wast among them, and Allah would not punish them while they sought forgiveness.”

<sup>45</sup> Ali bin Abu Talib, *Nahjul Balagha*, translated by Askari Jafri, Islamic Seminary Publications.

<sup>46</sup> Ali bin Abu Talib, *Nahjul Balagha*, translated by Askari Jafri, Islamic Seminary Publications.



Once, someone praised a sermon of Ali that was very impressive and eloquent. Ali responded: “Do not praise me. That would mislead me and beguile me into vainglory. Remember that all praise belongs to God alone.”

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One day Ali looked unusually sad and dejected. Upon asking, he said that he was feeling dispirited because he had not received any guest for the past one week.

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Both Ali and his wife Fatimah were noted for leading extremely simple lives and carried out all household chores by themselves, without the help of any servant or slave. Their house was bereft of furniture and other possessions that many people considered to be necessary. Upon asking for the reason, Ali responded:

“This worldly life is a journey and I like to travel light.”

●

Once during his Caliphate Ali was riding a horse when some people started to follow behind him. When he asked the reason, they said that they felt honoured walking in his entourage. Ali remarked:

“By following behind me you will breed feelings of inferiority in yourselves, and infect me with feelings of arrogance.”

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Soon after taking on the office of Khilafat, Ali was faced with a public outrage for the murder of ‘Uthman and a general demand to punish the perpetrators. However, much of the actual power lay in the hands of the rebels themselves and Ali waited for an appropriate time. When they did not see any action on the apprehending of the perpetrators, Talha and Zubair—two Companions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>—went to Basra and raised an army of sympathisers. ‘A’isha, who happened to be returning from her pilgrimage, was also railroaded to join the cause of Talha and Zubair against Ali. Learning of this rebellion, Ali marched from Medina to Kufa to seek assistance. After obtaining a sizeable force from Kufa, Ali marched upon Basra at the head of some ten thousand men.

Arriving at Basra, Ali sent his emissaries to both Talha and Zubair to negotiate peace to which they finally agreed.

However, the head of the trouble-making rebels, Ibn Saba, did not like this outcome and, during the secrecy of the night, attacked both armies. This created severe mistrust between the two fighting factions and numerous skirmishes erupted due to Ibn Saba's trickery. During the fighting, someone placed 'A'isha on a camel and brought her to the battlefield to help re-establish peace. This, however, had the opposite effect and actually raised the fighting spirit of those following Talha. Eventually, Ali's forces captured the camel and took off the litter containing 'A'isha. On arriving on the scene, Ali greeted 'A'isha and said, "O mother of the faithful, how are you? May Allah forgive all your sins." Having a touchy spirit, 'A'isha replied, "May Allah forgive your sins, too." Then 'A'isha remarked to a confidant of hers: "I wish I had died twenty years before the event of this day."

Ali made a similar remark of regret when he came across the body of Talha on the battlefield.



One day during his Caliphate, Ali was mending his old shoe when Ibn Abbas came to visit him. Ali asked him as to how much did he think the shoe was worth. To this Ibn Abbas replied that in his estimation it was worth no more than a quarter of a dirham. At this Ali exclaimed:

"By God, the Caliphate is less valuable to me than this shoe. I have no ambition to rule."



During the Battle of Jamal, Talha bin Ubaidullah and Zubair bin Awwam had fought against Ali. Both Talha and Zubair had strong ties with the clan of Banu Tamim through marriages to Abu Bakr's daughters Umm Kulthum and Asma respectively. When Abdullah bin Abbas was appointed the governor of Basra, he showed undue sternness towards the Banu Tamim clan many of whom had sided with Talha and Zubair in the conflict. When this behaviour of Ibn Abbas was reported back to Ali, he wrote him a letter, saying:

### *Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

“Understand Ibn Abbas that Basra is a satanic place. It is an abode of strife and bloodshed. So, be kind and tolerant towards the citizens of Basra. Win them over with kindness, sympathy and tolerance...”

“Remember that the star of Banu Tamim has not set yet. Amongst them, if one great man dies there is another to take his place. Remember that after embracing Islam and even during pre-Islamic days, these people were never regarded as mean, jealous or covetous...”

“May Allah have mercy upon you, Ibn Abbas! Be careful about your behaviour towards those over whom you are ruling; be kind to all and be careful about your tongue and your behaviour because you are ruling there on my behalf and your actions are those of mine and I am responsible for them. I have good opinion of you; please try to be such that I may not be forced to change it.”



During the Battle of Siffin, the army of Mu‘awiya controlled the source of water and denied access to the forces of Ali. When, during the course of the battle, the tables turned and the source of water came under the control of Ali’s forces, his people advised him to deny access to Mu‘awiya’s army. He refused the advice, saying:

“I would not pay the enemy in his own coin but in the coin of Islam.”



During the end of his life, Ali was asked to take protective measures against any dangerous attacks. Ali responded to this suggestion by saying: “The shield of God is around me and no one can harm me against the will of God. And if God wills me to be martyred, then no protective measures will avail me.”



In 661 C.E. in the month of Ramadhan, three assassins waited in the mosque in Kufa in the early morning and attacked Ali during his Prayer. One of the assassins was killed by the people while the second one escaped from Kufa. The third was apprehended alive. Ali said to the people that if he recovered from his wounds, he would decide the fate of

the assassin. If he died, the assassin was to be put to death but without dismemberment or inflicting a slow death.

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After the assassination of Ali, one of his close companions, Zirar bin Zamara, was visiting Damascus when Amir Mu'awiya called him and asked him to say something about Ali. Knowing Mu'awiya's animosity towards Ali, Zirar tried to avoid the subject. However, when Mu'awiya insisted, Zirar said:

“O Amir, I often saw Ali in the middle of the nights standing in the niche of the mosque with tears in his eyes and beseeching Allah to help him maintain a pious, virtuous and noble character and to forsake the world. He used to ask refuge from the allurements and temptations of the world and used to address the world asking it to stay away from him.”

Zirar says that when he stopped, there were tears in the eyes of Mu'awiya who said, “Yes, he was undoubtedly like that. Now tell me Zirar, how do you feel his separation?”

Zirar replied, “My sorrow and grief is like that of a woman whose only child has been murdered in her lap.”

Saying this, Zirar walked out of the court of Mu'awiya and left the city.

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## **Ja‘far bin Abu Talib (601-629 C.E.)**

The son of Abu Talib—an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>—and the younger brother of Ali, Ja‘far bin Abu Talib accepted Islam at a very early age and gave up his life fighting heroically in the Battle of Muthah in 629 C.E. He was brought up by his uncle Abbas bin Abdul-Muttalib and is reported to have resembled the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> greatly.



When opposition to Islam became unbearable in Mecca, some fifteen persons (eleven men and four women) migrated to Abyssinia in 614 C.E. As a rumour spread from Mecca that conditions had improved for the Muslims, many of the migrants came back, only to learn that nothing in fact had changed. As the persecution continued unabated, more Muslims decided to migrate to Abyssinia. In 615 C.E., about one hundred or so Muslims took part in the second migration to that country, this time led by Ja‘far bin Abu Talib. When the Quraish of Mecca learned of this, they sent a delegation—headed by Amr bin al-Aas—to the Abyssinian King, Negus, to return the emigrants. Negus, however, decided to investigate the matter himself and called Ja‘far in his court and said:

“What is this religion that you practise that has cut you off from the religion of your people? You also did not enter my religion nor the religion of any other community.”

To this, Ja‘far replied in most elegant words that remain a testament to the truthfulness of Islam to this day:

“O King, we were a people in a state of ignorance and immorality, worshipping idols, eating the flesh of dead animals, committing all sorts of abominations and shameful deeds, breaking the ties of kinship, treating guests badly and the strong among us exploited the weak. We remained in this state until Allah sent us a Prophet, one of our own people whose lineage, truthfulness, trustworthiness and integrity were well-known to us. He called us to worship Allah alone and to renounce the stones and the idols which we and our ancestors used to worship beside Allah.

“He commanded us to speak the truth, to honour our promises, to be kind to our relations, to be helpful to our neighbours, and to cease all forbidden acts.... We believed in him and what he brought to us from Allah and we follow him in what he has asked us to do....

“Thereupon, O King, our people attacked us, inflicted the severest punishments on us to make us renounce our religion and to take us back to the old immorality and the worship of idols. They oppressed us, made life intolerable for us and obstructed us from observing our religion. So we left our country, choosing you before anyone else, desiring your protection and hoping to live in justice and in peace in your midst.”



Negus was duly impressed by this eloquent speech and asked Ja‘far if he had anything to read from what the Prophet had brought. At this, Ja‘far recited in a very melodious voice the first part of Surah *Maryam* (Chapter 19 of the Holy Qur’an) which deals with the story of Mary and Jesus. Listening to this, Negus remarked, “The message of your Prophet and that of Jesus came from the same source....” The King then offered his protection to the Muslim migrants and refused to hand them over to the Quraish delegation. Facing their defeat, the head of the Quraish delegation, Amr bin al-Aas, told the King that the Muslims did not regard Jesus as highly as the King was being led to believe. At this the King asked Ja‘far as to what did he say about Jesus, the son of Mary.” To this, Ja‘far answered:

“We only say what has been revealed to our Prophet. Our Prophet says that Jesus is the servant of God and His Prophet. He is His spirit and His word which He cast into Mary.”

Hearing this, Negus exclaimed, “By God, Jesus the son of Mary was exactly as your Prophet has described.” Then, addressing the Muslims, the King said, “Go, for you are safe and secure. Whoever obstructs you will pay for it and whoever opposes you will be punished. For, by God, I would rather not have a mountain of gold than have anyone of you come to any harm.” Negus then ordered his courtiers to return the gifts brought by the Meccan delegation.

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Ja'far and his wife, Asma bint Umais, spent some ten years in Abyssinia and their three children were born while in that country. It is also reported that Ja'far bin Abu Talib took a trip from Abyssinia to India and Tibet along with Sa'd bin Abi Waqas. By the time Ja'far and his family came back from Abyssinia, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> had migrated to Medina and they joined him there in the year 626 C.E.

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In 629 C.E., the Prophet sent an army against the Byzantine forces in Levant<sup>47</sup> in retaliation for the treacherous killing of one of his envoys by the Byzantine governor. The Prophet appointed Zaid bin Harithah as the commander of the Muslim army with the instruction: "If Zaid is wounded or killed, Ja'far bin Abu Talib would take over the command. If Ja'far bin Abu Talib is wounded or killed, then Abdullah bin Rawahah will take over the command. If Abdullah bin Rawahah is killed, then let the Muslims choose for themselves a commander."

As the prescient command of the Prophet implied, Zaid, Ja'far and Abdullah bin Rawahah fell one after the other in the battlefield of Muthah. Just before he was killed, Ja'far bin Abu Talib called out: "How wonderful is Paradise as it draws near! How pleasant and cool is its drink..."

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When the news of Ja'far's martyrdom reached the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, he was greatly saddened and went to the house of his wife, Asma, and asked to see Ja'far's young children. When the children arrived, the Prophet hugged them with tears flowing from his eyes. Asma, who was already apprehensive at the appearance of the Prophet in her house, asked, "O Messenger of Allah, why do you cry? Have you heard anything about Ja'far and his two companions?" "Yes," the Prophet replied, "they have attained martyrdom."

Ja'far bin Abu Talib was buried in Jordan near the city of Amman where the later Muslims built an ornate tomb over his grave.

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<sup>47</sup> Levant is the area of western Asia that includes Syria, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon.

## **Abu Sufyan bin Harb (560-650 C.E.)**

Abu Sufyan was a noted elder among the Quraish and the head of the Umaiyad side of the tribe. He spent much of his life in opposition to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and only accepted Islam in 630 C.E. at the time of the Conquest of Mecca. While his own daughter Ramlah (Umm Habibah) accepted Islam early on, Abu Sufyan himself led Meccan armies against the Muslims on two occasions: in the Battle of Uhud and in the Battle of the Ditch. He accepted Islam at the time of the Conquest of Mecca and later fought alongside the Muslims in several battles. Abu Sufyan's son, Mu'awiya, founded the Umaiyad dynasty that ruled the Muslim world for 89 years. Abu Sufyan lived for ninety years and died during the Caliphate of 'Uthman.



After the Truce of Hudaibiya in 628 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> sent several letters to the kings and rulers surrounding Arabia. One such letter was sent to the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius<sup>48</sup>, who was visiting Syria at the time. Wishing to learn more about this Arab Prophet, Heraclius searched for an Arab caravan visiting the city. Abu Sufyan happened to be in town and was taken to the King's court. On questioning, Abu Sufyan confessed that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> came from a noble family and was in fact one of his distant relations. Answering the King's questions, he confirmed that no Arab in the past had made similar claim to prophethood and that no king or ruler had been present among Muhammad's own forefathers. He affirmed that his people had never found the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> telling a lie or breaking a pledge and that his followers were mostly poor, humble and young people who never went back to their old beliefs after conversion. On enquiring about the Prophet's teachings, Abu Sufyan answered:

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<sup>48</sup> Belonging to the Heraclian dynasty, Heraclius was born in 575 C.E. and reigned from 610 to 641 C.E. He brought the Byzantine-Sassanid War of 602-628 C.E. to a successful conclusion but eventually lost to the conquering Muslims.



“He teaches that we should worship One God and not set up equals to Him. He preaches against the worshipping of idols. He wants us to speak the truth and give up all evil and corrupt practices. He tells us to be good to one another, to keep our promises and to discharge our trusts.”

Abu Sufyan narrated later that after his interview, the King remarked:

“I knew that a Prophet was about to be raised, but I did not imagine that he would be raised among you Arabs. If what you have told me is true, I consider that the time is not far when this man will obtain dominion over the soil, which is under my feet...”

After leaving the King’s court, Abu Sufyan made this remark to his companions: “It seems to me that the star of Muhammad is on the ascent in as much as the Byzantine Emperor seems to be afraid of him.”



Now here is an interesting twist in the destinies of men.

While the Byzantine King was interrogating Abu Sufyan in 628 C.E., neither of them had any idea as to what fate had in store for them: that in exactly eight years, Abu Sufyan will be fighting the Byzantines alongside Muslim forces; that the Muslim forces will wrench control of Syria after the Battle of Yarmuk; and that not much later, Mu‘awiya, the very son of Abu Sufyan, will be officiating in Damascus, in place of King Heraclius, as the Muslim Governor of Syria!



In 630 C.E., the Muslims marched against Mecca to render justice for the breach of the Treaty of Hudaibiya. While the Muslim army of some ten thousand men camped in the outskirts of Mecca, Abu Sufyan was scouting around studying their encampment and estimating their strength. Eventually he was caught and brought in front of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> where he had the opportunity to observe the discipline of the Muslims and their extreme love for their master. Abu Sufyan remarked at the time:

“I have seen great courts. I have seen the courts of Khusrow and that of Kaiser, but I have never seen any people so devoted to their leader as the Muslims are to their Prophet.”

When the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> asked him if he was still unconvinced that there was no god except Allah, Abu Sufyan replied, “Had there been any god beside Allah, surely he would have been of some avail to us.”

By sunrise, Abu Sufyan had accepted Islam.

When he asked the Prophet that as he was the chief of the Quraish, some honour should be appointed for him, the Prophet asked him to go back to Mecca and announce that whoever took refuge in the house of Abu Sufyan would be safe.

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After accepting Islam, Abu Sufyan fought alongside the Muslims in many battles. In the battle against the city of Ta’if in 630 C.E, he lost one eye. When he informed the Prophet about the loss of his eye, the Prophet remarked: “What would you prefer: an eye in heaven or shall I pray to Allah that He bring it back?” To this Abu Sufyan answered that he would rather have his eye in heaven.

In the Battle of Yarmuk fought in Syria in 636 C.E. Abu Sufyan lost his second eye.

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In the early days of Islam, Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan opposed the new faith bitterly. This enmity took on the form of a raging desire for revenge after the Battle of Badr in which Hind lost her father, her uncle and her brother. When many houses in Mecca were mourning for the loss of their loved ones, the house of Hind was silent. When people asked her why she did not shed any tears, she exclaimed:

“Nay, I will not weep until you again wage war with Muhammad and his fellows. If tears could wipe the grief from my heart, I too would have wept; but it is not so with Hind.”

As a mark of her determination, she swore not to use oil in her hair or to go near the bed of Abu Sufyan, her husband.

In the Battle of Uhud, Hind had promised an Abyssinian slave his freedom if he killed the Prophet’s uncle, Hamza. After Hamza was thus brought down, Hind approached his lifeless body and, after cutting open his belly, chewed upon his liver to satisfy her intense lust for vengeance.



When a general amnesty was announced at the Conquest of Mecca, Abu Sufyan's wife, Hind, went to see the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> accompanied by several other ladies. She had bitterly opposed Islam from the very beginning and had perpetrated heinous atrocities upon the body of Hamza, the Prophet's uncle. Now, standing in a veil before the Prophet, she addressed him in the following words:

“O Messenger of Allah, praise be to Allah Who has made manifest the religion He has chosen for Himself. I beseech you out of the bonds of kinship to treat me well. I am now a believing woman who affirms the truth of your mission.”

Then she unveiled herself and said:

“I am Hind, the daughter of Utbah, O Messenger of Allah.

“Welcome to you,” the Prophet replied.

Hind continued: “By Allah, there was not a house on earth that I wanted to destroy more than your house. Now, there is no house on earth that I so dearly wish to honour and raise in glory than yours.”



## **Ikrimah bin Abu Jahl (580-636)**

Ikrimah was the son of Abu Jahl, a noted enemy of Islam and of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Abu Jahl was well respected and very influential among the Quraish and did not spare any opportunity to taunt and humiliate the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in front of his tribesmen. He was brutal to anyone accepting Islam and was responsible for the eventual migration of the Prophet to Medina. Abu Jahl commanded the Meccan forces against the Muslims in the Battle of Badr in 624 C.E., which the Meccans lost and in which Abu Jahl was killed. A year later, in 625 C.E., Ikrimah participated in the Battle of Uhud against the Muslims, seeking revenge for his father's death. The Meccan army managed to inflict severe losses upon the Muslims in this conflict. In 627 C.E., Ikrimah participated in the Battle of the Ditch against the Muslims in Medina but no significant fighting actually took place at the time. Ikrimah remained an important enemy of Islam until the Conquest of Mecca.

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At the time of the Conquest of Mecca in 630 C.E., the Prophet forgave all his previous tormentors and enemies and a general amnesty was declared to all the residents of the city who would lay down their arms and refrain from fighting. Not believing the Prophet's words, Ikrimah left Mecca heading towards the coast of Red Sea intending to reach Yemen by boat.

Back in Medina, Ikrimah's wife, Umm Hakim, accepted Islam along with Hind the wife of Abu Sufyan and several other Quraish ladies. After giving her own allegiance, Umm Hakim said to the Prophet: "O Messenger of God, Ikrimah has fled from you to Yemen out of fear that you would kill him. Grant him security and God will grant you security."

"He is secure," the Prophet promised. Umm Hakim then set out in search of Ikrimah and found him at the coast, making arrangements to set sail for Yemen. She pleaded with him to come back, saying, "I have come to you from the most generous of men, the most righteous of men, the best of men, from Muhammad ibn Abdullah. I have asked him for an amnesty for you. This he has granted. So do not destroy yourself."

“Have you spoken to him?” asked Ikrimah.

“Yes, I have spoken to him and he has granted you amnesty,” she assured him.

While Ikrimah was still on his way back to Mecca, the Prophet advised his Companions: “Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl shall come to you as a believer and a refugee. Do not insult his father. Insulting the dead causes grief to the living and does not reach the dead.”

When Ikrimah came to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, the latter got up and received him enthusiastically. “Muhammad,” said Ikrimah, “Umm Hakim has told me that you have granted me an amnesty.”

“That is right,” said the Prophet, “you are safe.”

“To what do you invite?” asked Ikrimah.

“I invite you to testify that there is no God but Allah and that I am the servant of Allah and His Messenger, to establish Prayer and pay the Zakat and carry out all the other obligations of Islam.”

“By God,” replied Ikrimah, “you have only called what is true and you have only commanded that which is good. You lived among us before the start of your mission and then you were the most trustworthy of us in speech and the most righteous of us. I testify that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger.”

Ikrimah then asked the Prophet to pray for his forgiveness. The Prophet prayed to God in the following words:

“O Lord, forgive him for all the hostility he directed against me and for all the expeditions he mounted wishing to put out Your light. Forgive him for whatever he has said or done in my presence or absence to dishonour me.”

Hearing this, Ikrimah, exclaimed:

“By God, O Messenger of Allah, I promise that whatever I have spent obstructing the way of God, I shall spend twice as much in His path and whatever battles I have fought against God’s way, I shall fight twice as many in His way.”



After his conversion to Islam, Ikrimah became a devout Muslim and took part in many armed conflicts during the Caliphates of Abu Bakr and

‘Umar. During the Caliphate of ‘Umar, in 636 C.E., Ikrimah participated in the Battle of Yarmuk in Syria against the Byzantine army in which the Muslims came out victorious and Heraclius, the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, had to cede control of all territory south of Anatolia. During the Battle of Yarmuk, Ikrimah fought heroically. He had penetrated so deep into the Byzantine ranks that Khalid bin Walid, the commander of the Muslim forces, admonished him to pull back, saying, “Ikrimah, your death will be a severe blow to the Muslims.”

“Let us carry on,” replied Ikrimah. “You had the privilege of being with the Messenger of God before this. As for me and my father, we were among his bitterest enemies. Leave me now to atone for what I have done in the past. I have fought against the Prophet on many occasions; shall I now flee from the Byzantines? This shall never be.” Then he rallied for other Muslims to join him in the attack and to fight until death. The daring attack of this group of Muslims paved the way for the Muslims’ victory in the battle.

After the fighting was over, a severely wounded Ikrimah lay on the battlefield, crying out for water. When a water-bearer approached him, someone else also asked for water. Ikrimah instructed the water-bearer to first give water to the other person. When the water-bearer approached the other person, someone else asked for water and the water-bearer was asked to go to the third person. By the time the water-bearer finally came around to Ikrimah, he had expired.



## **Bilal ibn Rabah (580-640 C.E.)**

Tall, thin and taciturn by nature, Bilal came from Abyssinia (Habasha in Arabic), and hence his moniker—Bilal al-Habashi. He was a slave in Mecca who accepted Islam in the early days and became a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. He was the first person to give *Adhan* in Medina and had a very attractive voice. Bilal was extremely attached to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and the feelings were very much mutual. Bilal belonged to such Companions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> who shunned the gathering of wealth and lived a life of meekness, simplicity and extreme austerity. Thus, the historians include him with such notables as: Ali bin Abi Talib, Salman al-Farsi, Abuzar Ghiffari, and Awais Qarani.



In Mecca, Bilal was a slave of a Quraish noble, Umaiyya bin Khalaf, who was a bitter foe of Islam and of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Bilal learned of the teachings of Islam through Abu Bakr who took him to the Prophet where Bilal immediately embraced the new faith. He was the seventh among the early converts, and the first among the slaves. Bilal kept his conversion secret for fear of upsetting his master. Umaiyya bin Khalaf, however, found out about the conversion of Bilal. As punishment, he would wait for the hottest time of the day and then, with the help of other slaves, would lay Bilal down on the hot sand and place a heavy stone upon his chest; then he would say to him:

“You will stay here till you die or deny Muhammad and worship instead *Al-Lat* and *Al-Uzza*<sup>49</sup>.”

While enduring this torture, Bilal would simply mutter, “*Al-Ahad.... Al-Ahad....*” meaning: The One, The One.

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<sup>49</sup> *Al-Lat* and *Al-Uzza* were deities of the Arabs. *Al-Lat* was a female deity located at Ta'if while *Al-Uzza* was identified with the planet Venus.

At other times, Umaiyya would scorch the flesh of Bilal with a torch raising a stench of burning flesh. Again, the only thing coming out of Bilal's mouth would be the words: "*Al-Ahad.... Al-Ahad....*"

●

One day, many years later, the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> were sitting and talking about the sacrifices they had made for the sake of Islam. One Companion turned to Bilal and asked him as to what sacrifice had he made in this regard. At this Bilal calmly replied: "I have put out the flames of burning coals with my own fat."

●

One day, Abu Bakr passed by when Bilal was being tortured and scolded the master, saying:

"Have you no fear of God that you treat this poor fellow like this? How long is this to go on?"

Umaiyya bin Khalaf replied, "You are the one who corrupted him, so save him from his plight that you see."

"I will," said Abu Bakr and purchased him from his master and immediately set him free. Knowing that Abu Bakr was bent upon saving the slave, Umaiyya exacted a good price for him but said out of spite that Bilal was so useless to him that he would have sold him even for a single dinar. At this Abu Bakr said that he would have bought Bilal even if he had asked a hundred dinars for him.

●

Bilal migrated to Medina in 622 C.E., the same year as the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> did and over the next decade, participated in all the military expeditions.

In Medina, people used to gather in the mosque for Prayers at the appointed time without being summoned. It was proposed to the Prophet that some arrangement should be made for summoning people and, after much discussion and deliberation, the system of *Adhan* (Call to Prayer) was decided upon and Bilal was selected for this purpose due to his attractive and penetrating voice. It is said that Bilal would wait on the top of the highest house for the dawn to break and then, stretching his arms, would first say this prayer, "O God, I praise Thee and ask Thy help for



Quraish that they may accept Thy religion.” Then he would call the *Adhan*.

●

Being from Habasha (Abyssinia), Bilal could not pronounce the “sh” sound of the Arabic letter “shin” properly and instead pronounced the “s” sound of the letter “sin”. When some people suggested that the task of calling the *Adhan* be entrusted to someone else, the Prophet remarked, “The ‘s’ of Bilal is ‘sh’ in the hearing of God”.

●

In 624 C.E., two years after the migration from Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> received several gifts from Najashi, the King of Abyssinia. These included a signet ring, a pair of shoes and a short spear. At the occasion of the Eid Prayer, it was Bilal’s honour to walk in front of the Prophet, carrying the spear. On reaching the Prayer ground, Bilal would pitch the spear in the ground some five to six feet in front of where the Prophet would stand.

Throughout his lifetime, it was Bilal’s honour to keep the Prophet’s spear.

●

After completing his *Mi‘raj*—the spiritual ascension to Heaven—the Prophet one day asked Bilal: “O Bilal! I heard the sound of your footsteps on the Heaven’s floor. What do you do which has made you achieve this feat?” Bilal responded with his usual humility: “I perform ablutions (ritual of purity) all the time, and say two *raka’as* of supererogatory Prayer for its acceptance.”

●

While returning from the Campaign of Khaibar, the Muslims camped on the way and Bilal volunteered to keep watch during the night. However, nearing the time of dawn Bilal fell asleep and it was only the warm rays of the sun that woke up the Muslims. Having missed the Morning Prayer, the Prophet was distressed and asked Bilal as to what had happened to him. Bilal responded politely, “The same thing that had happened to the Prophet!”

●

While in Medina, it was Bilal's duty to call the Adhan at the proper time. One time during the month of Ramadhan, Bilal approached the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> who was eating his morning meal prior to keeping the fast and said: "O Messenger of God, the time of *Sahar*<sup>50</sup> has passed." The Prophet continued to eat. Bilal repeated his observation once more and the Prophet still continued to eat. When Bilal reminded the Prophet for the third time by saying, "O Messenger of God, by God the time for *Sahar* is elapsed," the Prophet immediately stopped eating and said: "O Bilal! The time for *Sahar* had not elapsed. But God regarded your words and ended the time for *Sahar*."

●

The finest hour of Bilal came at the occasion of the Conquest of Mecca. After the city was captured without any bloodshed, the ex Abyssinian slave, who had been severely tortured in this very city, climbed on top of the Ka'ba and called the *Adhan*, summoning the believers to Prayer.

●

At the death of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, when his body lay in his chamber ready to be buried, Bilal stood up as usual to call the *Adhan*. But when he came to the name of the Prophet, he started sobbing so uncontrollably, that he could not complete the *Adhan* and decided never to call it again.

●

When Abu Bakr became the First Khalifa, Bilal went to him and said: "O Khalifa of the Messenger of Allah, I heard the Messenger of Allah say, 'The best deed of a believer is *jihad* in the cause of Allah'"

Abu Bakr responded, "So, what do you want, Bilal?"

He said, "I want to defend in the cause of Allah until I die."

Abu Bakr said, "And who will call the *Adhan* for us?"

Bilal replied with tears in his eyes, "I will not call the *Adhan* for anyone after the Messenger of Allah."

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<sup>50</sup> *Sahar* is the time before daybreak when all eating must cease if one is keeping a fast.

When Abu Bakr insisted that Bilal stay in Medina and continue calling the *Adhan*, he said: “If you freed me for your own sake, I will do what you wish; but if you freed me for the sake of God, leave me for Whom I was freed.”

At this Abu Bakr replied, “I freed you for the sake of Allah, Bilal.”



Bilal used to say that he could not live in Medina after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. He then went to Syria and fought alongside the Muslims against the Byzantine forces.

It is reported that during the Caliphate of ‘Umar, Bilal returned to Medina. One day people heard a commotion near the grave of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. When they came, they saw Bilal lying next to the grave and sobbing uncontrollably. While staying in Medina, many persons pressured Bilal to call the *Adhan* once more. These included ‘Umar himself, many Companions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> who were still alive, and Hasan and Husain who used to play with him when they were still young. Reluctantly, Bilal agreed to do it once again. When the people heard the familiar voice of Bilal, they came out of their homes with tears in their eyes, remembering the days when the Prophet of God used to be alive among them. When Bilal came to the phrase, “*I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God,*” he could not continue any further due to intense emotion and grief, and fell down in a swoon. From then on, he never called the *Adhan* again and left Medina for Syria.



Bilal lived to be about sixty years old and died during the Caliphate of ‘Umar. At Bilal’s death, ‘Umar is said to have remarked: “Today, our leader has departed from us!”



Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq is reported to have said, “May God bless Bilal! He loved us, the family of Muhammad, and was one of the most pious servants of God.”



The well known Liberian writer, diplomat and politician, Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912), who is regarded as the father of Pan-

Africanism and was himself born into slavery, pays this ultimate tribute to Bilal:

“It has been remarked that in the land of Asia, even Alexander the Great is an unknown personage when compared to this honoured black man.”



## **Abdullah ibn Hudhaifah Al-Sahmi (dates unknown)**

Being a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, ibn Hudhaifah holds the distinction of having met the two great Emperors of the time: Khusrow Parvez of Iran and Heraclius of the Byzantines. His meeting with Khusrow took place when he was deputed to deliver the Prophet's letter to him inviting the King to Islam. His meeting with Heraclius took place during the Caliphate of 'Umar when ibn Hudhaifah was sent to the land of the Byzantines to fight.



Immediately after the signing of the peace treaty in 628 C.E. with the Quraish at Hudaibiya, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> sent out several letters to the leaders and kings in and around Arabia, inviting them to Islam. Of the several Companions thus chosen, ibn Hudhaifah was assigned by the Prophet to carry his letter to Khusrow Parvez, the Sassanid King of Iran.

He set out alone on his camel and reaching the Kingdom of Iran, sought permission to enter the King's audience to deliver the letter. When he stood in front of the King in his ragged Bedouin clothes, contrasting sharply with the long flowing robe of the monarch, he was ordered to hand over the letter to a courtier. Ibn Hudhaifah refused, saying that the Prophet had asked him to deliver the letter directly to the King and that he would not go against the command of the Messenger of God. Ibn Hudhaifah was then allowed to approach the King and deliver the letter. The latter then asked one of his Arab clerks to read the letter to him. The clerk began: "In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of God, to Khusrow the ruler of Persia. Peace on whoever follows the guidance..." After hearing the opening lines, Khusrow flew into a rage. He snatched the letter from the interpreter's hand and tore it into pieces without even listening to the entire content. The King shouted: "Does he dare to write to me like this while he is my slave?" He was offended that the Prophet's name had been written first in the letter before his own name.

Ibn Hudhaifah left the King's court, mounted his camel, and set upon towards Medina. Later, the King wanted ibn Hudhaifah to be brought to

him, perhaps for punishment, but he was nowhere to be found. On reaching Medina, ibn Hudhaifah narrated the incident to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> who replied: “May God tear up his kingdom just as he has torn our letter.”

Khusrow issued orders to his Governor in Yemen to arrest the Prophet and bring him to the King’s court in Ctesiphon. The Governor sent his envoy to Medina to execute the King’s order. The Prophet told the envoy that his Master (God) had killed the Governor’s master (Khusrow Parvez).

The rest is history. Before the Governor could carry out his orders, Khusrow Parvez was killed by his own son, Kavadh II. The King’s Governor in Yemen was so impressed by this incident that he accepted Islam. During the Caliphate of ‘Umar, Persia was conquered by the Muslims and the then King of Persia fled, only to be killed later by a robber. Thus ended the great Sassanid Dynasty of Iran that had ruled the region for 327 years!!!



Ibn Hudhaifah’s meeting with Heraclius, King of the Byzantine Empire, was a more harrowing experience for him. In 641 C.E., Caliph ‘Umar sent his army to fight against the Byzantines in Syria. Heraclius gave orders to bring to him any Muslim whom they can capture. It was ibn Hudhaifah’s fate to be picked up as a captive.

The King offered to make a deal with ibn Hudhaifah. He offered him to accept Christianity in return for safe refuge. Ibn Hudhaifah refused. The King then offered to make him his own aide. Ibn Hudhaifah replied, “By God, if you give me all that you possess for giving up the religion of Muhammad, I shall not do so.” The King then threatened him with death. “Do what you want,” Ibn Hudhaifah answered.

Hudhaifah was then put on the cross and the King’s soldiers threw spears at his hands and feet, still asking him to convert. He kept on refusing. He was then brought down and witnessed the execution of two other Muslim prisoners who were thrown into boiling oil. The King again made his offer but ibn Hudhaifah refused again. Heraclius then ordered ibn Hudhaifah to be thrown into the boiling oil. When ibn Hudhaifah was being taken for his execution, he began to shed tears. Thinking that the

prisoner had been finally broken, the King suggested again for him to convert to Christianity. However, he refused. At this the King shouted: “Why did you weep then?” Ibn Hudhaifah replied, “I realised that after being thrown into boiling oil my life will end. At this I really desired that I be given as many lives as the hair on my body so that they can all be thrown into this pot for the sake of God.”

Surprised at this answer, the King had a change of heart and asked ibn Hudhaifah if he would kiss his head to be set free. At this ibn Hudhaifah inquired, “And all the Muslim prisoners as well?” The King agreed to this. Ibn Hudhaifah then went up to the King and kissed his forehead. The Muslim prisoners were then handed over to ibn Hudhaifah.

On returning to Medina, ibn Hudhaifah narrated the entire incident to the Caliph ‘Umar. The latter was pleased with this action of ibn Hudhaifah and said: “Every Muslim has a duty to kiss the head of Abdullah ibn Hudhaifah and I shall start.”



## **Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah (583-639 C.E.)**

Considered as one of the nobles of the Quraish, Abu Ubaidah was well known for his bravery, humility and modesty even before his conversion to Islam. According to Abdullah bin ‘Umar, three persons in the tribe of Quraish were most prominent for their modesty, their trustworthiness, and their strength of character: Abu Bakr, ‘Uthman and Abu Ubaidah.

Abu Ubaidah was a very early convert having accepted the new faith only a day after Abu Bakr in the year 611 C.E. He was also one of the ten persons who were given the glad tidings of entering Paradise<sup>51</sup> by the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Being an early convert, Abu Ubaidah went through all the indignities and harsh treatments meted out to the early Muslims in Mecca. He remained firm and constant throughout these trials. He participated in the Second Migration of Muslims to Abyssinia but returned to Mecca soon.

Abu Ubaidah took part in the various military Campaigns during the life of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and was the commander of one division that entered Mecca during the Conquest in 630 C.E.



The most distressing event of his life, however, took place in the Battle of Badr. Riding in the frontline of the Muslim forces, Abu Ubaidah fought with great courage. The Meccan force was wary of him and avoided facing him in combat. One person, however, kept on trying to engage him. Whenever that person would come in front, Abu Ubaidah would try to keep out of his way, avoiding fighting him. At one point during the battle, that person blocked Abu Ubaidah’s way and would not let him proceed any further. There was no way now but to engage that person in fighting. The two stood facing each other. Finally, Abu Ubaidah struck a fatal blow to the man’s head and he fell down on the ground. This was one of the

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<sup>51</sup> Known in Islamic history as *al-Ashara al-mubashareen* (the ten betided ones), they were: Abu Bakr, Umar, ‘Uthman, Ali, Talha, Zubair ibn Awwam, Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf, Sa’d bin Waqas, Abu Ubaidah, and Sa’id bin Zaid.



most harrowing experiences of Abu Ubaidah in his life: the man he had been trying to avoid and whom he had finally struck down was his own father!



In the Battle of Uhud, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> was struck by a stone thrown by a Meccan which drove part of his metal head-shield into the side of his face. Abu Ubaidah used his teeth to pull out one part of the plate embedded in the Prophet's cheek but one of his own incisor teeth fell to the ground. Then, with the other incisor tooth, he pulled out the second plate, losing this tooth in the process as well. At this, Abu Bakr remarked, "Abu Ubaidah is the best man at breaking incisor teeth!"



Abu Ubaidah was also an extremely trustworthy and honest person. Once a Christian delegation from Najran came to Medina and wished for arbitration on some question of property about which they disagreed among themselves. They asked the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> to send a Companion of his with them to judge in the matter. 'Umar bin Khattab narrates that he wished very much to be selected for this task. The Prophet, however, picked Abu Ubaidah and sent him with the delegation.



'A'isha narrates that once she asked the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> as to whom he loved the most. He replied, "Abu Bakr." 'A'isha then asked him as to whom did he love the most after Abu Bakr. The Prophet replied, "Abu Ubaidah."



When, after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, the Ansar<sup>52</sup> were preparing to select a leader of their own, 'Umar bin Khattab said to Abu Ubaidah:

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<sup>52</sup> *Ansar* (meaning helpers) were the Muslims living in Medina. The Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina were called *Muhajirin*, or the immigrants.

“Give me your hand and I will swear allegiance to you for I heard the Prophet say: ‘Every community has a custodian and Abu Ubaidah is the custodian of this community.’”

At this Abu Ubaidah replied, “I would not put my hand forward in the presence of a man whom the Prophet commanded to lead us in Prayer.” He then gave his oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr.

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Abu Ubaidah was a trusted advisor to Abu Bakr and ‘Umar and fought in many battles. Upon his own succession to Caliphate, ‘Umar appointed Abu Ubaidah as commander in-chief of the Muslim army, replacing Khalid bin Walid. Commanding some of the best Muslim generals of the time, Abu Ubaidah was responsible for the conquests of Aleppo<sup>53</sup>, Emesa<sup>54</sup>, Damascus, Jerusalem and Armenia.

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In 638 C.E., a severe drought took hold of much of Arabia and people began to perish because of hunger and disease. People from all over Arabia congregated upon Medina in hundreds of thousands to seek help and provisions. Caliph ‘Umar sent letters to all his governors asking them to send some aid. When Abu Ubaidah learnt of this, he wrote back to ‘Umar:

“I am sending you the caravans whose one end will be here in Syria and the other will be at Medina.”

True to his words, some four thousand camels arrived in Medina laden with food. ‘Umar appointed Abu Ubaidah himself to distribute the food to the people.

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In the later part of 638 C.E., some nine months after the drought, plague raised its ugly head in western Iraq and Syria. ‘Umar was already

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<sup>53</sup> Located in north-western Syria, Aleppo (*Halab* in Arabic) is the largest city in the country. Its importance lay in being at the end of the Silk Road.

<sup>54</sup> Emesa in the Greek language is the city of Homs (Hums) located north of Damascus. It is the third largest city in Syria after Aleppo to the north and Damascus to the south.

on his way from Medina to make a tour of Syria. Hearing of the pestilence and on the advice of his companions, ‘Umar decided to return from the Syrian border. Abu Ubaidah met ‘Umar there and said:

“O ‘Umar, are you running away from God’s will?”

To this ‘Umar replied very wisely, “Yes, I am running away from God’s will, but to God’s will.”



Abu Ubaidah remained obedient to the Caliphate throughout his life except for one incident. When, after meeting ‘Umar at the Syrian border, Abu Ubaidah returned to his base at Emesa, an epidemic of plague broke out within the army. When ‘Umar learned of this, he sent a letter to Abu Ubaidah ordering him to immediately leave his army and return to Medina. ‘Umar was thinking of eventually appointing Abu Ubaidah as his own successor to the Khilafat. Abu Ubaidah wrote back to the Caliph:

“I know that you need me to return. But I am in an army of Muslims and I have no desire to save myself from what is afflicting them. I do not want to separate myself from them until God wills. So, when this letter reaches you, release me from your command but permit me to stay on.”

When the letter reached ‘Umar and he read it, his eyes filled up with tears. People who were with him, asked if Abu Ubaidah had died. ‘Umar replied, “No. But death is near him.”

‘Umar’s perception was right. Not before long, Abu Ubaidah contracted the disease.



Before he died, Abu Ubaidah addressed his army in the following words:

“Let me give you some advice which will help you remain on the path of righteousness. Establish Prayer. Fast the month of Ramadhan. Give *Sadaqa*<sup>55</sup>. Perform the Hajj and Umrah<sup>56</sup>. Remain united and support one

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<sup>55</sup> *Sadaqah* is giving of voluntary alms in the way of God.

### *Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

another. Be sincere to your commanders and do not conceal anything from them. Don't let the world destroy you for even if man was to live for a thousand years, he would still end up in the state that you see me in (referring to his own dying). Peace be on you and the mercy of God.”



Then, just before dying, he appointed Muadh ibn Jabal as the leader. After Abu Ubaidah's death, Muadh addressed the people, saying:

“O people! By God, I don't know if I have seen a man who had a more righteous heart, who was farther from all evil, and who was more sincere to the people than he.”



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<sup>56</sup> *Umrah* is the lesser pilgrimage that can be carried at any time of the year.

## **Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf (580-652 C.E.)**

Being one of the first eight persons to have converted to Islam and also included among *al-asharatul mubashsharin* (the ten betided ones<sup>57</sup>), Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf became a devoted Companion of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and was one of the six persons nominated by ‘Umar on his deathbed to select the next Khalifa. He is one of the few Muslims who had participated in both emigrations to Abyssinia before finally migrating to Medina.

Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf participated in all the military expeditions with the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and suffered some severe injuries in the Battle of Uhud. He also had the honour of being one of the signatories to the Treaty of Hudaibiya as a witness.

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After his conversion to Islam, Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf suffered many indignities and injuries at the hands of the Quraish in Mecca much like other Muslims. One day, he came to the Prophet Muhammad and complained: “O Messenger of Allah! When we were infidels, we were respected. No one dared look at us with an evil eye. But since we have embraced Islam, we have become weak and helpless and we have to bear the cruelties of the disbelievers with humiliation. O Messenger of Allah! Pray give us permission to face our enemy.”

Hearing this, the Prophet Muhammad replied, “I have been commanded to be forgiving; thus I cannot give you permission to fight.”

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<sup>57</sup> The ten persons who were given the good news that they shall enter Paradise: the Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar bin Khattab, ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan, Ali bin Abu Talib, Talha bin Ubaidullah, Zubair bin Awwam, Sa’d ibn Malik, Abdur Rahman bin Auf, Sa’id ibn Zaid.

When Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf arrived in Medina, he was paired off with an Ansar<sup>58</sup> under the Prophet’s scheme to establish mutual brotherhood among the migrants and the resident Muslims of the city. His nominated brother, Sa’d ibn Rabi’ah, offered him half of everything that he possessed, saying:

“My brother, I have the most wealth among the people of Medina. I have two orchards and I have two wives. See which of the two orchards you like and I shall vacate it, and which of the two wives you like and I shall divorce her for you.”

Abdur Rahman, however, thanked him for his generous offer and asked him only to show him the way to the local market. Abdur Rahman started his business of trade in a modest way but quickly became very successful. At one time, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> prayed for him, “May Allah bless you in your wealth.” Abdur Rahman says that after this, he was so blessed in his profession that even if he lifted a stone, he expected to find a piece of gold underneath.

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No children were allowed to participate in the Battle of Badr. When the selection for fighters was being made, two young brothers eager to fight in the battle, stood on their toes to appear tall.

Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf narrated later that during the battle he was uneasy to see only two young boys of Ansar on his flanks instead of some experienced warriors. Then the boys inquired of him as to the whereabouts of Abu Jahl. When he asked them as to why they wanted to know, they replied that they had made a promise with God that either they would kill him or they would die fighting. As soon as Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf pointed Abu Jahl out to the young brothers, they made a dash towards him and eventually managed to kill him despite being severely wounded in the process.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ansar* (meaning helpers) were the Muslims living in Medina. The Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina were called *Muhajirin*, or the immigrants.

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One brother received such a severe blow that one of his arms almost separated from his body. Hanging uselessly by a mere shred of flesh, the nearly-severed arm interfered with the boy's fighting. At this, he placed the arm under his foot and, tearing it off his body, removed the interference and continued to battle.

An incident took place during the Campaign of Tabuk in 630 C.E. which conferred a unique honour upon Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf. Once during the Campaign, when the time of Prayer came and the Prophet was not present, the people asked Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf to lead them in the Prayer. After the Prayer had started, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> joined the worshippers and performed his Prayer behind Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf. Thus, for a brief moment, Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf was blessed as being the *imam* of the greatest person on earth—the *imam* of all the prophets!

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One time when Khalid bin Walid ordered the killing of Banu Khuzaima despite the fact that they had embraced Islam, Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf prevented him from doing so. This led to a verbal altercation between the two and Khalid bin Walid said, "You only disregard us because you preceded us in entering Islam." When Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf conveyed this incident to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, he is reported to have said:

"Do not abuse my Companions. By him who holds my soul in His hand, if any of you spent in charity the weight of Mount Uhud in gold, he would not attain the standard of any one of them, or even half of that."<sup>59</sup>

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The Prophet's prayer, that Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf be blessed in his wealth, remained with him for the rest of his life. Eventually he became the richest among the Prophet's Companions and his trading caravans brought all kinds of goods to Medina.

One day, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, the people of Medina heard a rumbling sound coming from the distance, accompanied

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<sup>59</sup> *Hadith Al-Bukhari.*

by a cloud of sand and dust. When the people came out on the streets they saw a herd of camels laden with all sorts of merchandise. It is reported that ‘A’isha heard the commotion and asked, “What is this happening in Medina?”

She was told, “It is the caravan of Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf coming from Syria.”

“Is all this noise being made by a caravan?” she asked incredulously.

“Yes,” she was told, “there are seven hundred camels laden with goods.”

At that moment, ‘A’isha suddenly remembered a saying of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>—which she had nearly forgotten—that he had seen Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf entering Paradise creeping. She mentioned this *Hadith*, along with what she saw that day in the streets, to some people in Medina. Some friends of Abdur Rahman brought this to his attention. Then he, too, remembered having heard this *Hadith* long time ago. He rushed to the house of ‘A’isha to confirm its validity. When ‘A’isha told him that she had personally heard it from the mouth of the Prophet, Abdur Rahman exclaimed:

“I would certainly like to enter Paradise while standing and not creeping. I swear to you that this entire caravan and all its merchandise will now be given away in the way of Allah.”

And so he did. In one of the most generous acts of charity, all the goods and merchandise carried by the seven hundred camels was distributed to the people of Medina and the surrounding habitations.



From that moment on, Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf distributed so much of his wealth that the figures mentioned in the history books are truly astounding. Yet, he continued to be blessed with more wealth in all his trading endeavours. One day, when a lavish tray of food was brought to him, he reminisced about another Companion of the Prophet who had died in utter poverty:

“Mas‘ab bin ‘Umair was better than me. On his death, we did not find anything to shroud him except a small piece of cloth which covered his head and left his legs bare... Then God blessed us with the bounties of the



world... I really fear that our reward has been given to us early (meaning in this world).”

Then he began to sob uncontrollably and could not eat.



When Abu Bakr was on his deathbed in 634 C.E., he decided to nominate ‘Umar as his successor. He called only two persons from all the Companions of the Prophet for consultation and advice before announcing his decision. These were Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf and ‘Uthman bin Affan. Abu Bakr entrusted them for supporting ‘Umar and implementing his decision.



In 644 C.E., when ‘Umar was dying from wounds suffered in a stabbing, he nominated a board of six persons to elect the next Caliph. These persons were: Sa’d bin Abi Waqas, Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf, Zubair ibn al-Awwam, Talha ibn Ubaidullah, Ali ibn Talib and ‘Uthman ibn Affan. ‘Umar had instructed them to make their decision in three days and that the new Caliph was to take his oath of office on the fourth day. Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf withdrew his eligibility from the office of Caliphate and was thus chosen by the others to act as moderator. He interviewed the board members and consulted other elders in the community and finally cast his vote in favour of ‘Uthman bin Affan who became the Third Khalifa.



Abdur Rahman bin ‘Auf died in 652 C.E., some four years before the assassination of ‘Uthman. The latter performed his funeral prayer and Ali made the following remark on the occasion:

“Abdur Rahman, you have bargained for the genuine coins while rejecting the fake coins of worldly opulence.”



## **Talha bin Ubaidullah (595-656 C.E.)**

An early convert to Islam and a cousin of Abu Bakr, Talha bin Ubaidullah was a devoted disciple and a noted Companion of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and one of the ten persons who were given the glad tidings of entering Paradise. He was one of the few persons in Mecca who could read and write.

Talha was closely related by marriages to the families of Abu Bakr and the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. One of his two wives, Umm Kulthum, was a posthumous daughter of Abu Bakr. The second, Hammanah bint Jahsh, was the sister of Zainab bint Jahsh, a wife of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. One of Talha's daughters, Umm Ishaq, married Hasan, the grandson of the Prophet and upon Hasan's death, married his younger brother, Husain.

Talha was an extremely able merchant and accumulated a great deal of wealth in Medina although he had arrived there as a penniless migrant from Mecca.

Talha was among the six persons nominated by 'Umar on his deathbed to select the next successor.

During the Khilafat of Ali, Talha pressured him to seek justice for the murder of 'Uthman and even confronted him in an armed conflict at the Battle of Jamal in which he was killed.



Once in his youth Talha visited Basra in the company of some merchants. There, a priest was enquiring if "Ahmad" had appeared in Mecca. He was saying that a Prophet was to emerge from Mecca and would then be driven out to a date grove.

On returning to Mecca, Talha asked around and learned that indeed a man named Muhammad bin Abdullah was claiming that he was a prophet and that Talha's own cousin, Abu Bakr, had already become his follower. Upon hearing this, he visited Abu Bakr who encouraged him to accept the new faith. Talha immediately offered his allegiance to the Prophet and explained to him what the priest in Basra had said (*Tabakat Ibn Sa'd*, 3/214-216).

Talha was only sixteen years old at the time.

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Being an early convert, Talha bore all the indignities and hardships that were meted out to the Muslims during their life in Mecca. One day, Naufal ibn Khuwailid, who was known for his physical strength and bravery and nicknamed “lion of the Quraish”, took hold of Talha and tied him up with a rope. Then he tied up Abu Bakr and joined him with Talha. Naufal then delivered the two of them to the mob to be beaten up and tortured. For this incident, Talha and Abu Bakr were given the moniker *Qarinain*, meaning the two linked together.

In 624 C.E., Naufal ibn Khuwailid was killed at the hands of Ali bin Abu Talib in the Battle of Badr.

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Mas‘ud ibn Hirash narrates that one day he saw a crowd of people between Safa and Marwa—the two hills in Mecca. The crowd was pushing a person from behind whose hands were tied behind his back. People were hitting him and an old woman was cursing him. Mas‘ud narrates that he asked as to who the person was and was told that it was Talha bin Ubaidullah who had given up his religion and followed the Hashimites. On asking as to who the old lady was who was cursing him, he was told it was Talha’s own mother.

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Talha was a very brave and courageous person. Whenever, the Battle of Uhud was mentioned in front of Abu Bakr, he would always say, “It was a day that belonged to Talha.”

It was in the Battle of Uhud that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> had called Talha ‘a living martyr’.

Towards the later part of the Battle of Uhud, the Muslim side suffered great losses and many of the remaining ones dispersed, leaving the Prophet poorly defended. When the Prophet and some of his companions climbed the mountain to seek refuge, some Meccans followed them. The Prophet called to his companions:

“Who can drive those men away and be my companion in Paradise?” At this Talha immediately volunteered but the Prophet kept him back, saying, “No, stay where you are.” Then one person from the Ansar

volunteered and was killed fighting. Again the Prophet called for a volunteer to fight the men still chasing the small party and Talha volunteered again. However, the Prophet kept him back. This went on for some time until no more companions were left by the side of the Prophet. At that moment, the Prophet gave permission to Talha to go and fight the men still coming after him. Talha sprang into action and fought valiantly with the enemy. He would intermittently fight with the men coming after the Prophet and then come back to defend the Prophet and help him climb higher. When Abu Bakr and Abu Ubaidah finally came to the Prophet's help, the Prophet asked them to go and help Talha. They found him lying unconscious and bleeding profusely from a great many wounds. His fingers were crippled due to stopping the many arrows directed at the Prophet. Later, the Prophet remarked, "Whoever would like to see a man who has met his death but is still walking on earth, he should see Talha bin Ubaidullah."<sup>60</sup>



Being a very successful merchant in Medina, Talha generously helped the cause of Islam and was always in the forefront in making financial sacrifices. This eventually earned him the epithets of "Talha the generous" and "Talha the open-handed" from the Prophet.

Jabir ibn Abdullah (607-697), a companion of the Prophet and of his descendents, narrates that "I never saw a man who gave more abundantly without being asked than Talha ibn Ubaidullah."

Sa'id bin Zaid, the brother-in-law of 'Umar, narrates, "I have accompanied Talha in his travels and I was with him in town, and I have never seen a man more generous in giving money, food and clothing than Talha."



One day, Talha received a large shipment of goods. He could not sleep all night as he kept thinking about how valuable they were. His wife, Umm Kulthum—the daughter of Abu Bakr—inquired if it was something

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<sup>60</sup> Isma'il Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari* (Traditions).

she had done which prevented him from falling asleep. He told her that he was finding it difficult to think of the Lord while worrying about some seven hundred thousand dirham worth of goods lying in the house. At this, his wife remarked:

“Why does it bother you? There are lots of poor and needy persons around. Tomorrow you can distribute it to them.”

“May God have mercy on you.” said Talha, “You are the just daughter of a just man.”

In the morning Talha distributed the entire wealth.



Talha was one of the six persons entrusted by dying ‘Umar to select the next Khalifa. In the last days of ‘Uthman’s Khilafat, Talha initially sided with the rioters. One day, during the siege of Medina, ‘Uthman called out to the rioters and wanted to know if Talha was among them. When Talha finally responded, ‘Uthman said, “I did not expect that you will be among the rioters.” ‘Uthman then asked Talha to recall when the two of them were together with the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and the latter had remarked, “‘Uthman will be my companion in Paradise.” Talha then corroborated what ‘Uthman had said and left the company of the rioters, returning to his home.



One hand of Talha had been mangled during his defence of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in the Battle of Uhud. When, at the election of Ali as the Fourth Khalifa, Talha offered his mangled hand in allegiance, many superstitious Arabs who were prone to omens took it as a sign that did not augur well for the future!



After the assassination of ‘Uthman, Talha and Zubair were among the foremost asking Ali to be their leader. However, they also sought justice and due punishment for the perpetrators of ‘Uthman’s murder. When Ali delayed his action upon this matter, both went to Basra and raised a force among their sympathisers. While at Basra, Talha is reported to have remarked, “I was guilty of a lapse in my conduct towards ‘Uthman and I

want to atone for such lapse by demanding vengeance for the blood of ‘Uthman.”

Ali then marched against them in 656 C.E. On arrival in Basra, Ali tried and succeeded in negotiating a peace with the forces of Talha and Zubair, who had also been joined by ‘A’isha who was returning from her pilgrimage to Mecca. The peace, however, did not sit well with the nefarious activities of the trouble makers. Their leader, Ibn Saba, contrived an attack upon the forces of Talha and Ali during the secrecy of the night and spread the rumour that they had attacked each other. This machination started a direct confrontation between the forces of Ali and Talha in the morning. Talha eventually decided to leave the battlefield but was felled down by an arrow shot at him by his own commander, Marwan ibn al-Hakam. Marwan did this to seek revenge for Talha’s involvement in the rioting against ‘Uthman—who was of the same clan as Marwan.

After the Battle of Jamal, Ali located the body of Talha on the battlefield and wept over it saying, “I wish I had died before seeing this day.”



## **Zubair bin Awwam (594-656 C.E.)**

Zubair was a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, being the son of Saffiya, a paternal aunt of the Prophet. He was also a nephew of Khadija as his father, al-Awwam, was Khadija's brother. He was related to Abu Bakr's family through his marriage to 'A'isha's sister, Asma bint Abu Bakr. Their son, Ibn Zubair, had the honour of being the first Muslim child born in Medina among the migrant (*Muhajiroon*) families.

He had accepted Islam at a young age of about sixteen and suffered through all the abuse accorded to the early Muslims in Mecca. His own uncle from his father's side used to regularly beat him for accepting the new faith. He participated in the migration to Abyssinia before finally migrating to Medina.

It is reported that while in Abyssinia, he showed great courage by going to an area where the people loyal to King Negus were fighting the enemy. He had to swim a great distance to reach the actual locality and eventually brought back the news of the victory of the King's defenders.

Along with Talha, Abdur Rahman bin 'Auf, and Abu Ubaidah, Zubair became a very well-to-do person in Medina and was noted for his wealth.

He was a trusted Companion of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and fought in many battles during the time of the Prophet and that of Abu Bakr and 'Umar. He commanded a regiment in the decisive Battle of Yarmuk which wrenched control of Syria and the adjoining territory from the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius.

After the death of the Second Caliph, 'Umar, Zubair kept himself out of politics and military affairs. After the death of 'Uthman, people of Kufa offered him the Khilafat but Zubair declined and gave his allegiance to Ali instead.

When the call for the vengeance of 'Uthman's blood became widespread within the land, Zubair joined the side of Talha and 'A'isha and took a stand against Ali.

After the Battle of Jamal, Talha was mortally wounded by an arrow shot by his own commander, Marwan ibn al-Hakam. Ali directed Zubair

to seek out Marwan and bring him to justice. However, Marwan and his men waylaid Zubair and killed him.

Zubair bin Awwam was one of the ten persons who were given the glad news of entering Paradise by the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. He was also one of the six persons nominated by ‘Umar on his deathbed to select the next Khalifa.



It is reported that Zubair was the first person among the Muslims who had drawn a sword to protect the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Once during the Prophet’s stay in Mecca, a rumour spread that the Quraish were torturing the Prophet near the Ka‘ba. Hearing this, Zubair took his bare sword and rushed to the site where he found the Messenger of Allah surrounded by people but otherwise safe. The Prophet was pleasantly surprised at this heroic action of a youth which could have easily cost him his own life.



In the Battle of the Ditch in 627 C.E., Zubair was sent behind enemy lines to gather information about their positions and plans. This risking of his life earned him the commendation of the Prophet who remarked, “Every Prophet has a disciple, and my disciple is al-Zubair.”<sup>61</sup>



After the martyrdom of al-Zubair, a mosque was built dedicated to his memory in the town of Al-Zubair, lying in south-eastern Iraq.



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<sup>61</sup> Reported in *Sahih* Muslim.



## **Awais Qarani (594-657 C.E.)**

Awais was a Muslim mystic who lived in Yemen during the life of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> but never had the opportunity to actually meet him. The Prophet used to say: “There is a follower of mine in my community through whose intercession God will forgive on the Day of Judgment as many men as there are hair on the sheep of the tribes of Rab’ia and Mudhar. The Companions asked him as to who this person was and where he lived. The Prophet said:

“His name is Awais and he lives in the Qaran area of Yemen. I have seen him with my inner eye.”

The Companions asked as to why he has not come for a visit.

The Prophet said, “There are two reasons: respect for the Islamic Law and state of poverty. His mother is old and blind and he earns money driving a camel. When you meet him, convey my greetings and ask him to pray in favour of my followers.”



When the time of the Prophet’s death approached, the Companions asked as to who should get the patched-up cloak of the Prophet. He replied, “Awais Qarani.”



During his own Caliphate, ‘Umar went to see Awais in 644 C.E. accompanied by Ali. On arrival, they found Awais in a desolate area, performing his Prayer. After he had finished, ‘Umar told him that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> had sent him his greetings along with his cloak and had asked him to pray for the forgiveness of his followers. Awais took the cloak and retired some distance away and prostrated himself in Prayer. When he was finished, ‘Umar looked at him and lost heart in his own Caliphate and exclaimed:

“Is there one who will buy it from me in exchange for a loaf of bread?”

At this Awais remarked that only a fool would do so!



‘Umar asked him as to why he never visited the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Awais in turn asked him whether he was a friend of the Prophet to which ‘Umar replied yes, he was. Awais then asked him as to which of the Prophet’s teeth were lost in the Battle of Uhud and why didn’t ‘Umar break his own teeth in sympathetic consideration. Then Awais opened his own mouth to show that all his own teeth were broken, explaining:

“I did not know exactly which teeth the Prophet had lost.”

Hearing this, ‘Umar began to weep and remarked that the station of love was something else entirely!

●

When ‘Umar asked Awais to give him some advice, the latter replied: “‘Umar, do you recognise God?” ‘Umar said, “Yes.”

Awais said, “After this if you do not recognise anyone else, it is better for you.” Then he asked, “‘Umar, does God recognise you?”

‘Umar said, “Yes.” Awais remarked, “If after this no one else recognises you, it is better for you.”

●

Once Awais Qarani was offered some money to which he responded: “I do not need it as I already have a coin.”

The person asked, “How long will that single coin last you?”

Awais replied, “If you can guarantee me that I shall live longer than this coin will suffice me, I will accept your gift.”

●

After the visit of ‘Umar and Ali, the people started showing great reverence to Awais Qarani which went against his nature and he left the area, rarely to be seen again.

Hiram ibn Hibbaan narrates that after hearing that Awais had prayed for the forgiveness of the Prophet’s followers, he desired to meet him. He finally located him while the latter was performing ablutions by the side of the River Euphrates. After Hiram greeted him, Awais returned the greeting by saying, “Hiram ibn Hibbaan, may Allah grant you a good reward. What has brought you here and who has showed you the road to me?”

Hiram said, “How do you know my name and the name of my father? You have never met me before.”

Awais Qarani answered, “He Whose knowledge is all-encompassing has informed me. My soul has recognised your soul since the souls of the faithful recognise each other.” Then he asked, “O ibn Hibbaan, what has brought you here?”

He answered, “To become your friend and to reform myself.”

To this Awais Qarani remarked, “I cannot even think of a man who has recognised Allah and he still derives comfort from others.”

Then Hiram asked him to give him some advice. Awais said, “Keep death under your pillow when sleeping. When you wake up, do not cherish hope of life. Never consider sin as being minor. If you consider sin as being minor, you also consider God as being insignificant.”

Hiram then asked him as to where should he take up residence, to which Awais replied, “In the land of Syria.”

When Hiram asked him as to how should he earn his living, Awais exclaimed, “Alas! Pity those souls who are beset with doubt and uncertainty and refrain from accepting advice.”

After this, the two parted, never to see each other again.



Awais spent much of his life in ascetic retreat, generally avoiding people. It is reported that during the Caliphate of Ali, Awais fought for him against Mu‘awiya and was killed in the Battle of Siffin in 657 C.E.



## **Sa'd bin Abi Waqas (595-664 C.E.)**

Sa'd was an early convert, being the seventeenth person who accepted Islam. He was a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> from his mother's side and became the Prophet's Companion and fought in many battles. He was one of several Muslims who sought shelter in Abyssinia when opposition to Islam became unbearable in Mecca. He is considered a notable commander and statesman by later historians. As a youth, he was disappointed in the ways of his people and when Abu Bakr took him to meet the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and learned of his teachings, he immediately accepted the new faith.

●

When his mother learned of Sa'd's conversion, she was extremely upset with him for giving up the religion of his own father and mother and asked him to forsake his new faith or else she would not eat or drink until she died. Despite Sa'd's pleas not to do it, his mother followed up with her threat and stopped taking anything in. Several days went by and his mother became weak and emaciated. When she refused to eat anything, Sa'd addressed her in the following words: "O mother! Despite my strong love for you, my love for God and His Messenger is much stronger. By God, if you had a thousand lives, and one life after another was to depart, I would not abandon this religion for anything."

Seeing his strong determination, his mother gave up the fast and began eating and drinking again.

●

In the Battle of Uhud, Sa'd was specially chosen by the Prophet as one of the best archers to guard the narrow passage on one side of the battle field. When many of the other archers were fooled by the Meccan army's tactics and deserted their positions to gather the spoils of war, Sa'd never left his site and fought vigorously. To urge him, the Prophet said:

"Shoot, Sa'd, may my mother and my father be your ransom."

Referring to this occasion, Ali once remarked that the Prophet had never used such words for anyone other than Sa'd.

●

Sa'd took part in the Battles of Qadisiyya (636 C.E.) and Nahawand (642 C.E.) on the Persian front during the Caliphate of 'Umar. After appointing him commander of the Muslim forces, 'Umar addressed Sa'd as follows:

“O Sa'd, let not the fact that you are a cousin or Companion of the Messenger of God distract you from God. There is no connection between God and anyone except obedience to Him. In the sight of God, all people whether noblemen or commoners are the same. They all seek elevation through righteousness. Consider how the Messenger of God used to act with the Muslims and act accordingly...”<sup>62</sup>

●

Sa'd bin Abi Waqas is also credited by the Chinese Muslims for introducing Islam to their country in 650 C.E. However, modern scholarship has determined that it was in fact his father, Abi Waqas, who went to China and not Sa'd himself.

●

In his later years, Sa'd became blind and settled down in Mecca. He was constantly surrounded by people who would solicit his blessings and ask him to pray for them. A youth once asked him: “Your prayers for others seem to be answered. Then why don't you pray for your own blindness to be cured?”

To this, Sa'd replied, “Submission to the Will of God is far better than the personal desire of being able to see.”

●

His share of spoils from many wars that he had fought had brought him considerable wealth in the form of gold, silver and beautiful garments. However, when he lay dying on his deathbed, he asked his son to open a certain box where he kept a coarse woollen gown. “Shroud me in this,” he said to his son, “for in this gown I met the idolaters on the day of Badr and in it I desire to meet God Almighty.”

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<sup>62</sup> Abdul Wahid Hamid, *Companions of the Prophet*, p 203, MELS, 1995.

## **Abdullah bin Mas‘ud (598-650 C.E.)**

One great proof of the veracity of a true religion is that even ordinary persons, without any formal education and training, can reach the heights of wisdom and spiritual insights. Abdullah bin Mas‘ud was one such person.

He was born in a very humble family and was commonly called “Ibn Umm Abd” meaning “the son of the mother of a slave”.

Being a young shepherd in his childhood, he served the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> after converting to Islam at an early age and then gained such understanding of the Book of God and such knowledge of Islam that many people would come to him to partake of that knowledge and many noted scholars of the later days considered him as their teacher.

He took part in all the three migrations: twice to Abyssinia and once to Medina. He also took part in all the military campaigns.

●

One day while he was just a young boy and was tending the flock of sheep belonging to his master, two tired persons approached him and asked him to milk one of the sheep for them. He responded, “The sheep are not mine. I am responsible for only looking after them.”

Despite being very thirsty, the two men were greatly pleased by this honest answer from a young boy. The two persons were the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and his Companion Abu Bakr.

●

Having met the Prophet himself, it was not long before Abdullah bin Mas‘ud accepted Islam and began looking after the personal needs of his new master. It is reported that he was the sixth among men who accepted the new faith.

He carried out all the household chores for the Prophet including preparing his tooth-brush stick, fetching water for ablution, carrying his bedroll, and fetching his slippers. He adapted his own manner and bearing according to that of the Prophet so much so that people began to say, “He is the closest to the Prophet in character.”

Many visitors to the Prophet's house believed that Abdullah bin Mas'ud was actually a member of the household since they saw him and his mother move so freely in their comings and goings. Once the Prophet told Abdullah, "O Abdullah, you do not need permission to enter my house. You are always welcome."

●

Abdullah bin Mas'ud became the best at reciting the Qur'an and understanding its meanings. 'Umar narrates that one day he and Abu Bakr were with the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in the mosque when they saw a man standing in Prayer whom 'Umar did not recognise. The Prophet stood by him and listened to his recitation and then turning to 'Umar and Abu Bakr, said, "Whoever wants to read the Qur'an as fresh as when it was revealed then let him read according to the recitation of Ibn Umm Abd."

After his Prayer, Abdullah bin Mas'ud sat making supplications. At this the Prophet remarked, "Ask and it will be given to you. Ask and it will be given to you."

●

Later in his life Abdullah bin Mas'ud became so well-versed in the knowledge of the Qur'an that he used to say, "By Him besides Whom there is no God, no verse of the Book of Allah has been revealed without my knowledge as to where it was revealed and the circumstances of its revelation. By Allah, if I know there was anyone who knew more of the Book of Allah, I will do whatever is in my power to be with him."<sup>63</sup>

●

It is reported that once 'Umar came across a caravan during the darkness of the night. 'Umar asked as to where the caravan was coming from. A voice answered: "From *Fajj 'amiq*," meaning a 'deep valley' in the Qur'anic language.

"And where are you going?" asked 'Umar.

"To *Baitul-Atiq*," meaning the 'Ancient House' in the Qur'anic language.

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<sup>63</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*.

‘Umar remarked that there must be a learned person in the caravan. Then ‘Umar asked, “Which part of the Qur’an is the greatest?”

The voice came, “Allah—there is no God but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting....,” referring to *Ayatul Kursi*, verse 2:256.

Then ‘Umar asked, “Which part of the Qur’an is most clear on justice?”

The voice came, “Verily, Allah requires you to abide by justice, and to treat with grace, and give like the giving of kin to kin....,” referring to verse 16:91.

Then ‘Umar asked, “What is the most comprehensive statement of the Qur’an?”

The voice came, “Then whoso does an atom’s weight of good will see it, and whoso does an atom’s weight of evil will *also* see it,” referring to verses 99:8-9.

‘Umar then asked, “Which part of the Qur’an gives rise to the greatest hope?”

The voice said, “Say, ‘O My servants who have committed excesses against their souls! Despair not of the mercy of Allah....,’” referring to verse 39:54.

Then ‘Umar asked, “Is Abdullah bin Mas‘ud among you?”

“Yes, by Allah,” the men replied from the caravan.



It was common saying among the people that: “Knowledge of the Companions of the Prophet reached its climax in two persons: Ali and Abdullah bin Mas‘ud.”<sup>64</sup>



The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> is reported to have said once:

“If I am to choose anyone as *Amir* (leader) without consulting the Muslims, it would be Abdullah bin Mas‘ud.”



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<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that Abdullah bin Abbas was another highly learned man among the Muslims of that time. Perhaps the given quote refers to some exceptional situation.



Once during the early days of Islam in Mecca, some Companions of the Prophet mentioned that the nobility of the Quraish had not yet listened to an open and loud recitation of the Qur'an. They asked if someone would volunteer to do it. Abdullah bin Mas'ud immediately volunteered for the task. The Companions said that they were afraid for him and wished for someone whose clan was strong enough to afford him protection.

Saying, "Allah will protect me and will keep me away from their evil," Abdullah bin Mas'ud proceeded to the Ka'ba. Standing at the landmark of *Maqami Ibrahim* (the Station of Abraham), Ibn Mas'ud began to recite Surah *Al-Rahman* in a loud and most eloquent voice.

Initially the Quraish wondered as to what it was that he was reciting. However, when they realised that this was part of what the Prophet had brought, they began to slap his face while he continued reciting. After he finished, his face was bleeding and covered with bruises and welts. When the Companions remarked that they had duly warned him, he responded, "By Allah, I am not any less comfortable than the enemies of God. If you wish, I shall do it again tomorrow."<sup>65</sup>

●

During the Caliphate of 'Umar, Abdullah bin Mas'ud was appointed in charge of the Public Treasury at Kufa. When a salary was offered by 'Umar, Abdullah refused it by saying, "Why do you try to turn me to the world?"

When during his own Caliphate, 'Uthman offered to pay him the stipend that he had been refusing for years, Abdullah responded, "I have no need for it."

When 'Uthman suggested, "Let it be for your daughters after you," Abdullah bin Mas'ud responded, "Do you fear poverty for my children?"

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<sup>65</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat-e Rasulallah*

## **Fatima Al-Zahra (605-632 C.E.)**

Being the fourth and the youngest daughter of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and his wife Khadija, Fatima was born in 605 C.E., just five years prior to the beginning of the Qur'anic revelations. Not only did the Prophet love her very much, but of all his children, Fatima resembled her father the most. She was weak of stature and generally quiet and melancholy in disposition. She was brought up under close supervision of her father and developed into an extremely pious, humble, generous and sympathetic lady. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> frequently expressed his paternal love for Fatima by saying:

“O Fatima! God will not like a person who displeases you and will be pleased with a person who wins your favour.”



After the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> declared his mission, the Quraish of Mecca began to mistreat him. Once when the Prophet was praying at the Ka'ba and was in the state of prostration, Abu Jahl and his companions placed the large and heavy placenta of a camel upon his back. Fatima at the time was just a young girl. When the news of this event reached her, she rushed to the Ka'ba and removed the placenta from the back of the Prophet while scolding the men.



Fatima was married to Ali at the age of eighteen. All she received from her father as dowry was a mat, a corn grinding stone, a water carrier and an earthen pitcher. At the time of marriage, the Prophet said to his daughter:

“My daughter, I have married you to the dearest of my family to me and to a person who has stronger faith and is more learned than others and one who is distinguished for his morality and his virtues.”



Fatima led a very peaceful life in Medina. Ali earned a living by labouring all day while Fatima busied herself with household chores without any assistance from servants or slaves. She was frail of constitution and the hard work of using the grindstone and fetching water

from the well were taking their toll. One day, she approached her father and pleaded with him to give her a servant. Although moved by her plea, the Prophet replied solemnly:

“I cannot spare anyone from the service of *Ashabi Suffa*<sup>66</sup>. You should be able to bear the hardships of this world in order to get the reward of the Hereafter.”



Instead of giving Fatima a servant, her father offered her a gift that was much better. He asked her to recite, after the end of every daily Prayer, God’s Exaltation, the statement of Absolute Gratitude, and the Invocation of Divine Glory, for specified number of times. Fatima was satisfied with this and went back to her daily routine of household labour, never again making a similar request in her life.



Once a visitor came to Medina and the Prophet asked a Companion of his to take him to some Muslim who could feed him as the visitor was hungry. The Companion took him to several houses but none had any food available at that hour. Finally, the Companion took the visitor to Fatima’s house and explained the wish of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. With tears in her eyes, Fatima responded that she herself had not eaten for three days: “But I cannot send back a hungry guest without satisfying his hunger.”

Saying this, she took off her sheet of cloth and asked the Companion to sell it to a Jewish merchant and purchase some corn. On learning of the reason for the sale of cloth, the Jewish merchant remarked, “The Torah has informed us about the birth of this virtuous family.”

The Companion brought the corn home which Fatima ground with her own hands and, baking loaves out of it, offered them to the visitor. When the Companion suggested that she keep some loaves for her own children, she remarked that she had no right over something that she had already given away for the sake of God.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ashab-i Suffa* was group of people who spent practically all their time in the mosque, eager to spend every moment in the company of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>.

●

Of all his wives, the Prophet loved ‘A’isha the most. One day, at the prompting of the other wives, Fatima complained against the preferential treatment accorded to ‘A’isha. The Prophet merely smiled and said, “My dear, won’t you love the person whom your father loves?”

●

‘A’isha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, reports that one day, during the Prophet’s last illness, Fatima visited her father. ‘A’isha noticed that the Prophet whispered something in the ear of his daughter which made her weep. Then the Prophet whispered something else in her ear which made her smile. After the Prophet’s demise, ‘A’isha once asked Fatima as to what was it the Prophet had said that day which made her weep and then smile. Fatima replied that first the Prophet told her that he was going to die. This made her weep. Then the Prophet informed her that she was the first one from his family to join him in the next world, and this made her smile.

Fatima passed away in 633 C.E. at the age of 28, just a little over six months after the death of her father.

●

Fatima loved the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> immensely and was devastated at his death. She used to mourn her father’s death by writing verses to his memory. One verse goes as follows:

“If someone smells the fragrance of Muhammad’s tomb,  
No wonder that he will never smell another perfume.  
Destiny has hurt me with bereavement—so sad and so dark—  
That if it had fallen upon the days,  
They would have turned into eternal nights.”

●

## **‘A’isha bint Abu Bakr (610-678 C.E.)**

Born around the same time as the beginning of Prophet Muhammad’s mission, ‘A’isha became his third, most loved, and favourite wife. Brought up under the tutelage of her illustrious husband, ‘A’isha grew up to be one of the most knowledgeable, scholarly, and respected persons of her day. A great many Traditions have come down through her narration and she was routinely consulted on knotty problems. Abu Musa Ash’ari narrates that they never came across any difficult situation about which they had consulted ‘A’isha and she did not provide any useful information. She was extremely pious, very generous, and lived an austere life. She spent only nine years married to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> and passed away at the age of 68 during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph, Mu‘awiya.

●

While still at Mecca, ‘A’isha was engaged to be married to Jubair bin Mut‘im. When the prospect arose of her possible marriage to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, Abu Bakr’s wife suggested to her husband to break off the engagement with Jubair. Abu Bakr, however, refused to do it on the grounds that he had already given his word. Jubair, who had not converted to Islam, was himself not interested in this match. As well, his family was concerned that Abu Bakr’s acceptance of Islam may expose their son to the influence of the new faith. Jubair’s family, therefore, broke the engagement. Once ‘A’isha was free, her parents wedded her to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. However, the marriage was not consummated until 623 C.E., a year after they had all migrated to Medina.

●

‘A’isha narrates that after her marriage to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, they had to cope with long spells of starvation and days would go by before any fire would be lit in the hearth of their house. When one day she complained about the situation, the Prophet cheered her up by saying:

“Why don’t you knock at the door of Heaven?”

“But how?” queried bewildered ‘A’isha.

“Why, with your gnawing hunger,” the Prophet replied.

●

Of all his wives, ‘A’isha was the dearest to his heart and she, too, loved him very much. Once she asked him: “How is your love for me?”

To this the Prophet replied, “Like the knot of a rope,” meaning it was strong and secure.

Many a time she would ask him, “How is the knot?” to which the Prophet would reply, “In the same condition!”

●

Her love for the Prophet was a jealous one and this frequently showed through her treatment of the other wives. One of the Prophet’s wives, Saffiya, who was of Jewish origin and an outsider, often received a discriminatory treatment from the Prophet’s other wives. Once, ‘A’isha called her a “shrimp” on account of her short stature. The Prophet overheard the remark and said: “‘A’isha, you have said a word that, if dropped in the sea, would pollute the whole water.”

●

On another occasion, ‘A’isha and Zainab teased Saffiya regarding their own ethnic superiority by saying that they were not only the Prophet’s wives but were also related to him. When Saffiya complained about this to the Prophet, he said:

“Saffiya, why didn’t you reply by saying that your father was Aaron, your uncle Moses and your husband is Muhammad; so how can they be superior to you?”

●

‘A’isha narrates that of all the wives of the Prophet, she was most jealous of Khadija because of his constant mentioning of her name. Whenever the Prophet would sacrifice an animal, he would send a portion to Khadija’s friends. Once, when ‘A’isha complained as to why he spoke so highly of a ‘dead Quraish woman’, the Prophet was visibly grieved and said:

“She believed in me when others rejected me. When others denied me, she affirmed my truthfulness. When I stood forsaken, she spent her wealth to lighten the burden of my sorrow...”

●

‘A’isha was a spirited lady with strong character and strong will. She was very outspoken and freely expressed her mind even in front of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Whenever she would win an argument from someone, the Prophet would remark with a smile—as if the other should have known—“She is the daughter of Abu Bakr!”

●

In 627 C.E., ‘A’isha accompanied the Prophet in the expedition against the Banu Mustaliq. On the way back when the caravan stopped momentarily, she got off the camel to relieve herself. Before she could return, the caravan took off again and the cameleer did not notice her absence. On returning to the place, ‘A’isha found the caravan gone. So she sat down and waited, hoping for some help to arrive. Not much later, a young Muslim named Safwan ibn Mu’attal came by whose duty was to follow the caravan and see if anything had fallen off. He alighted from his camel and, making it kneel down, allowed ‘A’isha to get on top while he led the camel on foot.

As they caught up with the caravan, the people were surprised to see ‘A’isha with another man. This incident got blown out of proportion by the hypocrites in Medina and brought great distress to ‘A’isha and her family. When someone informed ‘A’isha as to how she was being scandalised, she felt extremely miserable and asked for the Prophet’s permission to stay with her parents. ‘A’isha was also saddened by the fact that the Prophet had withdrawn from her and was not paying her his customary attention.

One day, the Prophet came to her parents’ house and, in their presence, said to her: “‘A’isha, you have heard what some people are saying about you. If you are innocent, then Allah Himself will protect your honour and if by accident there has been a lapse on your part, then seek the forgiveness of Allah and He will pardon you...”

‘A’isha then turned to her father to answer on her behalf. He replied that he did not know what to say. ‘A’isha then turned to her mother with the same request and she, too, gave the same answer. ‘A’isha then answered herself:

“I am a young girl who does not yet recite much of the Qur’an. By Allah, I know that you have heard this story that people are saying and you have believed it. If I were to say that I am innocent, you would not believe me. If I was to confess to something—and Allah knows that I am innocent—you would believe me. By Allah, I can only say what the father of Yusuf said, ‘Patience is beautiful, and Allah is my protection against what you describe.’<sup>67</sup>

She had hardly finished speaking when she noticed perspiration on the face of the Prophet, indicating that he was receiving a revelation. After a little while, the Prophet smiled and said to her, “Do not worry ‘A’isha, for Allah has revealed<sup>68</sup> proof of your innocence.”

‘A’isha’s mother asked her to get up and thank the Prophet. At this ‘A’isha exclaimed with her customary spirited nature, “By Allah, I will

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<sup>67</sup> Surah *Yusuf*, 12:19.

<sup>68</sup> Surah *Al-Noor*, 24:12-20, as given below:

Verily, those who brought forth the lie are a party from among you. Think it not to be an evil for you; nay, it is good for you. Every one of them shall have *his share of* what he has earned of the sin; and he among them who took the chief part therein shall have a grievous punishment.

Why did not the believing men and believing women, when you heard of it, think well of their own people, and say, ‘This is manifest lie?’

Why did they not bring four witnesses to *prove* it? Since they have not brought the *required* witnesses, they are indeed liars in the sight of Allah!

Were it not for the grace of Allah and His mercy upon you, in this world and the Hereafter, a great punishment would have befallen you for *the slander* into which you plunged.

When you pick up the word spread by your tongues and start uttering with your mouth *that* of which you have no real knowledge and consider it to be of no significance, whereas in the sight of Allah it is an enormity.

And wherefore did you not say, when you heard of it, ‘It is not proper for us to talk about it. Holy art Thou, O God, this is a grievous calumny!’

Allah admonishes you never to return to the like thereof, if you are believers.

And Allah explains to you the commandments; and Allah is All-Knowing, Wise.



not thank him or praise him but rather Allah Who has given the revelation that has protected my honour.”

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Despite her own very frugal living, ‘A’isha would never turn away a beggar from her door. She maintained her ascetic lifestyle right through the Pious Caliphate when Muslim conquests brought great riches to the people. Once she received a large sum of money as her share of the conquests. She asked her maid to distribute it all to the poor. When in the evening it was time for ‘A’isha to break her fast, there was nothing to eat in the house. When the maid said that couldn’t ‘A’isha have saved a dirham and bought some meat with it, she replied, “If I had thought of it, I would have done it so.”

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When she was dying, she indicated her desire to be buried in the main cemetery of Medina. After the passing away of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, she always wanted to be buried next to him. However, when ‘Umar bin Khattab asked her permission to be buried next to the Prophet, she readily agreed and gave him her intended place.

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‘A’isha had an excellent memory and was one of the four persons who transmitted more than two thousand Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> (other three being: Abu Hurairah, Abdullah bin ‘Umar and Anas bin Malik). She had such mastery over her knowledge of Islam that the Prophet once said, “Learn a portion of your religion from this red coloured lady,” alluding to the colour of her hair. This remark earned her the epithet of ‘*humaira*’ meaning red.

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Al-Ahnaf ibn Qais, a well known general during the time of the Prophet, once remarked: “I have heard speeches of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman and Ali and the Caliphs to this day, but I have not heard a speech more persuasive and more beautiful from the mouth of any person than from the mouth of ‘A’isha.”

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## **Habib ibn Zaid Al-Ansari (611-631 C.E.)**

Habib and his parents were among the first to accept Islam in Medina. They were among the seventy-five or so persons from Medina who gave their oath of allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in 622 C.E. at Aqaba, a valley near Mecca. Habib was hardly eleven years old at the time and gave allegiance to the Prophet with his own tender hands. After this moment, the Prophet became dearer to Habib than his own parents.

At the time of the Battle of Badr and the Battle of Uhud, Habib was considered too young to bear arms. Later on, however, he participated in all the armed conflicts and proved himself as a brave fighter. Yet, his most harrowing experience was to take place when Islam would become victorious in Arabia.



By the year 631 C.E., Islam had become a dominant religion in Arabia. The power of the Quraish and the surrounding Meccan tribes had been broken in the Conquest of Mecca and the Battle of Hunain. Various tribes in Arabia were converging upon Medina to offer their allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. This was happening with such frequency that the ninth year of the Hijra (migration) is known in history as the Year of the Delegations.

During this period of fervent acceptance of Islam, some people from Najd belonging to the tribe of Banu Hanifah came to Medina in the form of a delegation. Just before entering the city they left their belongings in a camp under the supervision of one of their tribe mate, Musailma. After meeting with the Prophet, the entire delegation accepted Islam. As a token of joy, the Prophet gave each member of the delegation a gift. At this, the delegation advised him of one of their members looking after their belongings outside of Medina. The Prophet also gave them a gift for him.

On returning to Najd, Musailma recanted his allegiance to the Prophet. He had been a magician of sorts and possessed a charming voice and a charismatic personality. He told his fellow tribesmen that just as Muhammad was a prophet unto the Quraish, so was Musailma a prophet unto the Banu Hanifah. Many a tribesman accepted his claim out of tribal

loyalty. In fact, one tribesman declared: “I testify that Muhammad is indeed truthful and Musailma is indeed an imposter. But the imposter from Rabia<sup>69</sup> is dearer to me than the truthful person from Mudhar<sup>70</sup>.”

As Musailma’s popularity increased within his tribe, he felt confident enough to write the following letter to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>:

“From Musailma, the messenger of God to Muhammad, the messenger of God. Peace be on you. I am prepared to share this mission with you. I shall have half the land and you shall have the other half.”

Musailma then sent the letter with two of his trusted followers. When the Prophet received the letter, he questioned the two men as to what did they think themselves of this matter. They replied that they affirmed as to what the letter said. The Prophet told them that were it not the fact that they were emissaries, he would have punished them. The Prophet then sent his own letter to Musailma, carried by the same two messengers:

“In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful. From Muhammad the Messenger of God to Musailma the imposter. Peace be upon whoever follows the guidance. God will bequeath the earth to whosoever of His servants He wishes and the final triumph will be for those who are careful of their duty to God.”

Musailma, however, continued his mission in Najd and went on deceiving simple-minded persons who became his followers and supporters. The Prophet wrote another letter to him to give up his misguided ways and deputed Habib ibn Zaid to carry the letter to Najd, the territory of the Banu Hanifah. Habib at the time was about twenty years old and full of zeal in the service of Islam. He made haste to Najd and personally delivered the letter to Musailma. On reading the letter,

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<sup>69</sup> Rabia was a tribal confederation to which Banu Hanifah belonged.

<sup>70</sup> Mudhar was a tribal confederation to which the Quraish belonged.

Musailma flew into a rage and ordered Habib to be tied down in chains and to be presented to him the next day.

On the following day, Habib was brought forth in shackles in an assembly presided by Musailma who asked him, “Do you testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God?” “Yes,” Habib replied, “I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” While visibly angry at the answer, Musailma continued, “And do you testify that I am the messenger of God?” To this Habib replied, “My ears have been blocked against hearing what you claim.”

Musailma flew into a rage with his face changing colour and his lips trembling with anger. He shouted to the executioners to cut off a piece of Habib’s body. The executioner advanced towards Habib with his sword and cut off one of his arms. Musailma then asked Habib the same question again. Habib again affirmed belief in the messengership of Muhammad and refused to acknowledge the messengership of any other. Musailma then ordered his executioners to cut off the other limb. The second arm fell down beside the first one. The people looked in amazement at the composure and steadfastness of the young man being treated so brutally.

With continuing questioning by Musailma and the continuing blows given by his henchmen, Habib was severely cut down and soon passed away. Yet, to his last breath, he continued to affirm that Muhammad was the Messenger of God.



At Habib’s death, the Prophet commended him and his entire family and prayed: “May God bless this household. May God have mercy on this household.”

When the news of Habib’s martyrdom reached his mother in Medina, she said: “It was for such a situation that I prepared him... He pledged allegiance to the Prophet on the night of Aqabah as a small child and today as an adult he has given his life for the Prophet. If God were to allow me to get near Musailma, I would certainly make his daughters smite their cheeks and lament over him.”



The day that she wished for eventually came. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, Abu Bakr declared war against the imposters and the false claimants to the dominion of Arabia. The Muslim army that went to confront the forces of Musailma included Nusaibah, the mother of Habib, and Abdullah ibn Zaid, his brother.

At the Battle of Yamamah fought in December 632 C.E., Nusaibah was seen cutting through the ranks of the fighters and calling out: “Where is the enemy of God? Show me the enemy of God.” When she eventually reached Musailma, he had already perished. He had been killed by Wahshi, the Abyssinian slave, who had also killed Hamza in the Battle of Uhud before accepting Islam.



## **Abdullah bin Abbas (618-687 C.E.)**

A cousin of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> from his paternal uncle, Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib, Abdullah bin Abbas was born a couple of years before the *Hijra* to Medina and grew up to be one of the most learned and venerated scholars of Sunnah and exegesis of the Qur'an.

While Abdullah's father, Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib, only converted to Islam after the Battle of Badr, his mother, Umm al-Fadhl accepted Islam on the same day as Khadija, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Thus, Abdullah bin Abbas grew up in an Islamic atmosphere from an early age.

He was only thirteen years old when the Prophet passed away. However, he spent his early childhood in the service of the Prophet by fetching his water for ablution and carrying out other chores for him. He also made it a point to attend all the Prophet's assemblies and to accompany him on all his travels and campaigns. The Prophet would often draw him close, pat him on the shoulder and pray, "O God! Teach him the Book."

It is reported that Abdullah bin Abbas followed the Prophet like a shadow, praying behind him during the *tahajjud* supererogatory Prayer and listening to every word that the Prophet uttered during his discourses. He had an excellent memory and is narrator of well over sixteen hundred Traditions.

His constant striving for knowledge and his God-given intelligence and wisdom eventually led to his epithet among the people as "the learned man of the *Ummah*".



Once when the Prophet was performing his Prayer at home, he asked Abdullah bin Abbas to stand by his side. However, Abdullah stood behind him. After the Prayer, the Prophet asked him as to what prevented him from standing by his side. Abdullah replied, "You are too illustrious and too great in my eyes for me to stand by the side of you."

The Prophet then raised his hands and prayed, "O Lord, grant him wisdom."



Abdullah bin Abbas continued to learn the Hadith of the Prophet even after the latter had passed away. He would go to the many Companions of the Prophet and ask them to narrate something about the Prophet. This he would commit to memory.

Once he learned that a certain Companion of the Prophet knew a Hadith with which Abdullah bin Abbas was not familiar and wanted to hear it directly from his mouth. He went to the house of the Companion and sat down on the ground, outside the house, waiting for him to emerge. When the Companion finally came out, he was distressed to see Abdullah sitting on the ground, covered in dust. He said, “O cousin of the Prophet! What is the matter with you? If you had sent for me I would have certainly come out.” At this Abdullah bin Abbas replied, “I am the one who should come to you, for knowledge is sought, it does not just come.”

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Abdullah bin Abbas was ready and willing to serve anyone from whom he could learn anything. One particular person who was the object of his admiration and devotion was Zaid bin Thabit, the well known scribe of the Qur'an and a leading judge and jurist in Medina. Every time Zaid wanted to go on a journey, Abdullah would come and stand humbly like a servant, holding the reins of his mount. This was distressing to Zaid who would say to him, “Do not do this, O cousin of the Prophet.”

Abdullah, however, would respond, “Thus we were commanded to treat the learned ones among us.”

Zaid would then ask Abdullah to stretch out his hand. Taking it in his own, Zaid would then kiss it, saying, “Thus we were commanded to treat the members of the Prophet's household.”

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During his own Caliphate, 'Umar particularly sought the advice of Abdullah bin Abbas whom he called “the young man of maturity.”

Sa'd bin Abi Waqas, a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, narrates, “I have never seen someone who was quicker in understanding, who had more knowledge and greater wisdom than Ibn Abbas. I have seen 'Umar summon him to discuss difficult problems in the presence of

veterans of Badr from among the Muhajirin and the Ansar. Ibn Abbas would speak and ‘Umar would not disregard what he had to say.”



His keenness to acquire knowledge was only exceeded by his intense desire and sense of duty to spread it among the people. He once remarked, “When I realize the importance of a certain verse of God’s Book, I would wish that all people should know what I know.”

It is reported that his house was treated by the people literally like a university where they would crowd in at all hours of the day to obtain knowledge about the Sunnah, exegesis of the Qur’an, laws of inheritance, Arab history, poetry, jurisprudence, pronunciation and etymology.



Because of his great piety, wisdom and knowledge, Abdullah bin Abbas was regarded very highly among the Muslims. Masruq ibn al-Ajda (d. 682), who was a student of Ibn Abbas and later became a great scholar of Islam himself, reports: “When you looked at him, he was the most handsome of men. When he spoke, he was the most eloquent of men. And when he held conversation, he was the most knowledgeable of men.”



During the Caliphate of Ali, Mu‘awiya refused to step down as governor of Syria and Ali was forced to round up a force and march against him. After a brief fight, the dispute between the two was deferred to arbitration. A large group of Ali’s sympathizers became disappointed at Ali’s acquiescence to arbitration and separated from him.

Abdullah bin Abbas sought Ali’s permission to speak with these dissidents. When Ali agreed, Abdullah asked the dissidents as to the specific complaints that they had against Ali. They named the following three:

- Ali had agreed to arbitration in the dispute which portrayed him as weak,
- Ali fought in the Battle of Jamal but did not allow the taking of spoils of war nor prisoners of war, and
- Ali did not insist on the title of Amir al-Mu‘minin during the arbitration process



One by one, Abdullah bin Abbas addressed the complaints of the dissidents in the following words:

“With respect to the first point, God says in the Qur’an that during your pilgrimage, you are forbidden from hunting (5:96). If you do hunt, the compensation is to be decided by two just men. Now, if for a rabbit worth a quarter of a dirham, you are required to seek the judgment of two just men, then why can’t Ali seek the advice of two just persons for matters that affect the entire Ummah?

“With respect to the second point where Ali did not take spoils of war and prisoners of war in the Battle of Jamal, would you have liked to take ‘A’isha, the Mother of the Faithful, as a prisoner and treat her as captives are usually treated?

“As to the third point that Ali did not insist on his title of Amir al-Mu’minin during the arbitration process, you should recall that during the Treaty of Hudaibiya, the Prophet had also not insisted on his title of ‘Muhammad, the Messenger of God’ and had agreed to write simply ‘Muhammad, son of Abdullah’, in the interest of peace.”

These erudite explanations of Abdullah bin Abbas won back most of the dissidents who re-affirmed their allegiance to Ali.



## **Al-Ahnaf ibn Qais (625-695 C.E.)**

Hailing from one of the largest, well respected and influential Arab tribe of Banu Tamim<sup>71</sup>, Al-Ahnaf (meaning clubfooted) earned his moniker due to a congenital defect in his feet. He was a child during the life of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> but never had the opportunity to actually meet him. The Prophet, however, said a prayer for him. At one time, the Prophet sent a Companion of his as a missionary to the tribe of Banu Tamim, inviting them to Islam. After listening to the Prophet's message, Al-Ahnaf remarked, "Indeed, he calls to goodness and I hear nothing but goodness." When this response was conveyed back to the Prophet, he prayed, "O Allah, forgive Al-Ahnaf."<sup>72</sup> Throughout his life, this prayer was very dear to Al-Ahnaf and he felt very proud of it.

Historians describe him as intelligent, smart, and sincere. According to one biographer of his, "The sanity and wisdom of Al-Ahnaf always prevails when it is compared with others."

Because of the conversion of Al-Ahnaf, his entire tribe accepted Islam. When after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> many other tribes renounced Islam, Banu Tamim continued to remain Muslim. Similarly, when Musailma made his own claim to prophethood and lordship of Arabia, Al-Ahnaf met him and then returning to his own tribe, advised them to stay away from his falsehood.

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During the reign of 'Umar, Al-Ahnaf encouraged a large number of his tribesmen to volunteer in the cause of Islam. Al-Ahnaf fought on the Iranian front where 'Umar made him the head of an army contingent to complete the conquest of Khurasan<sup>73</sup> in 643 C.E.

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<sup>71</sup> Abu Bakr also belonged to the Banu Tamim tribe.

<sup>72</sup> As reported by Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal in his book, *Al-Zuhd*.

<sup>73</sup> Khurasan is a historical region that includes present day areas of north-eastern Iran, northern Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan.

When Khurasan was finally conquered, Al-Ahnaf wrote to ‘Umar about the victory but informed him that the full mission could not be completed as the Persian King, Yazdgerd III, had escaped. After receiving the news, ‘Umar praised Al-Ahnaf and remarked, “This is the leader of the Eastern land who does not deserve his moniker (the clubfooted)!” ‘Umar, however, forbade him to chase Yazdgerd III deeper into Persian territory and ordered him to consolidate the conquered lands instead. Yazdgerd III was eventually killed by a robber in 651 C.E. thus ending the Sassanid dynasty that lasted for more than three centuries.



Sometimes, his intelligence and sincerity was viewed by others as something that was “too good to be true”. ‘Umar once placed a restriction on Al-Ahnaf forbidding him to leave the borders of Medina for one year. During this period, ‘Umar observed him very closely. After eventually lifting the restriction, ‘Umar told him:

“O Ahnaf, I purposely put you under observation as a trial. However, I saw nothing in you except goodness. I hope what lies in your heart matches what I have seen. The reason I put the restriction on you was that we used to hear, ‘This *Ummah* will be ruined by a knowledgeable hypocrite’. However, *Alhamdulillah*, we have found you to be a knowledgeable believer.”



When the restriction on his movements was removed, Al-Ahnaf moved to Basra. ‘Umar then sent a letter to Musa Al-Asha’ari, the governor of Basra, stating: “Keep him close to you, consult him and listen to his advice.”



When, during the Battle of Jamal, the Muslims split into two factions bent upon fighting each other, Al-Ahnaf isolated himself along with all his men and did not take part in the conflict. He sent a letter to Ali saying, “I will restrain ten thousand swords from fighting against you.”



When Mu‘awiya succeeded Ali as Khalifa in 661 C.E., Al-Ahnaf paid a visit to him and warned him in very strong words to refrain from fighting

other Muslims and from any *fitna* (disorder). After he had left, Mu'awiya's sister asked him as to who was the person who had threatened him so strongly. Mu'awiya replied:

“He is the one who, if he gets angry, a hundred thousand men from Banu Tamim also get angry for him without knowing the reason behind his anger.”



When Al-Ahnaf passed away around 694 C.E. during the reign of Abdul Malik, the fifth Umayyad Caliph, Musa'ab bin Al-Zubair remarked: “Today, firmness and wisdom have passed away”.



## **‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz (682-720)**

Born half a century after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz was the eighth Caliph in the Umaiyyad dynasty that was founded by Mu‘awiya in 661 C.E. However, unlike other Umaiyyad Caliphs who had turned the institution of Caliphate into monarchy, ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz managed his office along the style of the early Pious Caliphs. Like an oasis in the desert, his short period of Caliphate was the high point of the Umaiyyad rule.



When ‘Umar bin Abdul Aziz was appointed as the Khalifa, he called some elders in the community and confessed: “I have been afflicted with this problem; what can be done to get me out of this trouble? Although people may consider it as a blessing, I regard this Caliphate as suffering.”

One of the advisors replied, “If you wish to be spared God’s punishment on the Day of Judgment, then treat the elderly Muslims like your father, the young ones like your brothers, and their children like your own children. Then conduct your affairs with them in the same way as you conduct your affairs with your own family. This entire Islamic land is like your own home and its residents are like your own kin.”



Upon assuming office in 717 C.E., ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz returned all the trappings of the Caliphate to the Public Treasury. He moved out of the palace into a tent, and gave up all pomp and show for which the Umaiyyad Caliphs had become well known. He made the institution of Caliphate a democratic one, with frequent consultations with noted jurists and wise persons in the community. He returned all the properties to their rightful owners, which had been confiscated by the earlier Umaiyyad Caliphs. At one point, his faithful slave asked whether he was leaving anything for his own children. “God,” replied ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz.



One day his wife entered his chamber during the night when he was working on state papers under the dim light of an oil lamp. She asked if he had time to discuss a private matter.

“Sure,” he replied, “but first put out the state lamp and light your own. I do not wish to burn the state oil for our private talk.”



One day his wife found him weeping after saying his prayers. Concerned, she asked if he had been distressed by something. He replied:

“O Fatima! I have been made a ruler over the Muslims and the strangers, and I was thinking of the poor that are starving, and the sick that are destitute, and the naked that are in distress, and the oppressed that are stricken, and the stranger that is in prison, and the venerable elder, and him that has a large family and small means, and the like of them in countries of the earth and the distant provinces, and I felt that my Lord will ask an account of them at my hands on the Day of Resurrection, and I feared that no defence would avail me, and I wept.”<sup>74</sup>



A biographer of the Caliph, Ibn al-Jawi, writes that, “‘Umar wore clothes with so many patches and mixed with his subjects so freely, that when a stranger came to petition him, he found it difficult to recognise the Caliph.”

Once a woman visited the Caliph’s house seeking charity. While she met with the Caliph’s wife, she saw a person dressed in rags applying repairs to the walls of the building. Upset at the scene, she scolded the wife: “Don’t you have fear of God? Why don’t you veil yourself in the presence of this man?”

The woman was surprised to learn that the raggedly-dressed person was in fact the lady’s husband, ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz.



When many of his agents wrote to him that his fiscal reforms in favour of the new converts will deplete the Treasury, he replied, “I will be glad, by Allah, to see everybody become a Muslim, so that you and I would have to till the soil with our own hands to earn a living.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ahmad, Jamil, *Hundred Great Muslims*, Feroz Sons Limited, Pakistan 1984.

<sup>75</sup> Encyclopaedia of Islam.

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‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz is reported to have remarked once: “Rulers usually appoint people to watch over their subjects. I appoint you a watcher over me and my behaviour. If you find me at fault in word or action, guide me and stop me from doing it.”

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The rule of ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz was very short and lasted only two years. Yet, many Muslim scholars include his name among the list of the Pious Caliphs along with Abu Bakr, ‘Umar bin Khattab, ‘Uthman and Ali. Shah Waliullah, an 18<sup>th</sup> century scholar of Islam, regards ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz as the Mujaddid (Reformer) of the first century of Islam.

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It is said that at the time of his death, the Caliph left behind only seventeen dinars with a will to use this sum as a rent for the house that he lived in and as payment for the plot of land in which he will be buried.

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It is reported on the authority of Muhammad bin Mubad, who happened to be in the court of the Byzantine Emperor, Leo III of the Isaurian dynasty<sup>76</sup>, that one day the Emperor looked gloomy and on enquiry, replied with reference to ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz:

“A virtuous person has passed away. After Christ, if anyone could put a dead person to life, it was he. I am hardly surprised to see an ascetic who renounces the world and gives himself to the worship of God. But I am certainly surprised at a person who had all the pleasures of the world at his feet and yet he shut his eyes against them and passed a life of piety and renunciation.”

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<sup>76</sup> Leo III, “The Isaurian”, was born in 685 C.E. and ruled the Eastern Roman Empire from 717 to 741 C.E.

## **Malik bin Dinar (658-748 C.E.)**

Born of a Persian slave in Sejestan<sup>77</sup>, Malik is noted for being a trustworthy transmitter of many Traditions and for being a calligrapher of the Qur'an. When living in Damascus he was well known for his handsome countenance and great wealth. Later in life he gave up all his wealth and took to the life of an ascetic mystic. He spent some time as a disciple of the famous Muslim Sufi, Hasan Basri, and also lived in Basra for many years. It is said that Malik was one of the earliest mystics to have visited India where he laid the foundation of the first mosque in that country. It is located at Thalangara, Kasaragod, in the state of Kerala (in the Western Ghats of south India, facing the Lakadive Sea). The mosque is known today by the name of Malik Dinar Jum'a Masjid.



Given to heavy drinking in his early life, the motivation leading to his repentance is described below in Malik's own words:

"I used to drink heavily and whenever my baby daughter would come into my lap, she would spill my wine on to my clothes. But for my extreme love for her, I never scolded her. When my daughter was two years old, she passed away. I was totally dejected by her death and one night I took to drinking and fell asleep without even saying my night Prayer.

*In my dream I saw that the Day of Judgment has been established and people are coming out of their graves and rushing towards the Doomsday Plain. Suddenly I felt a movement behind me and saw that a frightening dragon was following me. I saw an old man coming towards me whom I asked to help against the dragon. However, he confessed to his weakness and said that he could not face such a mighty dragon. I then ran towards a mount but saw Hell fire in front of me. I was about to fall in when I heard a voice saying, "Move back, you are not of the inmates of Hell." I then turned around but the dragon was still chasing me. Then I climbed onto a second mount where I*

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<sup>77</sup> Known also as Sistan, Seistan or Sakastan, it is a historical region that corresponds to modern day Iran (Sistan and Baluchistan), southern Afghanistan (Nimruz, Kandahar and Zabul) and Pakistan (Nok Kundi in Baluchistan).



*saw a round hill with many windows made of gold and adorned with gems. Suddenly, the windows flew open and a large number of young children with radiant faces emerged to help me against the dragon. My deceased daughter was among them. She ran towards me and wrapped herself around my legs calling, "Father, father." I picked her up and she extended her right hand towards the dragon at which the dragon withdrew. She moved her hand upon my beard and asked innocently, "Father, has the time not come yet that the hearts of the believers melt at the mention of God's name and submit in front of the True Message that He has revealed?" Hearing this admonition, I began to cry. She explained that the dragon was in fact my evil deeds that were pushing me towards Hell; the old man was my righteous deeds that, due to their paucity, were too weak to save me.*

"This dream was the real motivation. As I woke up, I repented from all my evil doings."



While living in Damascus, Malik used to spend a great deal of time praying at a local mosque built by the Umaiyads. One day he wished to be made the trustee and caretaker of the mosque. Thus, he intensified his worship and seclusion in the mosque to the extent that he came to the notice of all people. However, nothing came out of it. A year later, when coming out of the mosque, he heard a voice saying: "O Malik, you should seek forgiveness." He felt ashamed at his self-serving motivation for worship and prayed all night with great sincerity and free of any show or pretence. In the morning, he saw a crowd gathered outside the mosque which was dissatisfied with the running of the mosque and suggested that Malik be made the trustee and caretaker. However, he declined the offer and continued with his worship, now totally devoid of any element of vanity and hypocrisy.



One day Malik was debating with an atheist about the existence of God. Both gave numerous arguments and counter responses. The people gathered around them could not decide upon the winner. Finally it was suggested that both men put their hands in the fire and the one who is on the right, his hand will be saved. A fire was brought and both put their

hands in the fire. It is said that the fire did not burn either person's hand. While the atheist merrily went home priding on his feat, Malik bin Dinar fell dejectedly in prostration and cried to the Lord disconsolately that after seventy years of devotion and spiritual pursuit he had finally reached the station of an atheist! At this he heard a voice that said:

“You do not know but because of the blessing of *your* hand, the fire did not burn the hand of the atheist.”



There is a story in the *Tadhkiratul Auliya* that after the death of Malik bin Dinar, a Muslim saw in a dream that Malik and Ibn Wasi' (an eighth century Muslim saint known for his asceticism) were both led into Paradise. However, Malik was more honoured and was allowed to enter first. When he inquired, stating that he believed Ibn Wasi' was the more noble of the two, he was told that that was true. But that Ibn Wasi' possessed two shirts, while Malik bin Dinar possessed only one!



## **Abu bin Adhem (700-777 C.E.)**

Ibrahim bin Adhem, known popularly as Abu bin Adhem, was an 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Sufi mystic from Balkh<sup>78</sup>. Living the life of a chieftain with all the trappings of a very rich noble man, Abu bin Adhem eventually abdicated his worldly life and possessions for an austere and ascetic existence, dedicated to the worship of God and love of humanity. It is said that three incidents in his life became the motivating force for this change.



One day Abu bin Adhem was holding his court in all its pomp and glory when a stranger walked into the room, approached the ostentatious seat of Abu, and said that he wanted to stay in this inn for a while. Taken aback, Abu told him that it was his palace and court and not an inn. The stranger inquired as to who lived in the palace before Abu. To this Abu replied, “My father.”

Then the stranger asked as to who lived here before his father and Abu replied, “My grandfather.”

Thus, Abu took the names of his ancestors who lived in the palace in the past. Then the stranger asked as to who will live here after Abu had gone, to which Abu replied, “My children.”

The stranger remarked that if a place, where so many persons came and went and no one lived permanently, was not an inn then what was it. Saying this, the stranger left the court.



It is narrated that one day a chambermaid was tidying up Abu bin Adhem’s room when she was fascinated by the softness of the silken bed sheets. On an impulse, she decided to lie down on the bed for a moment but soon fell asleep because of its luxuriant comfort. When Abu bin Adhem walked into his chamber and saw the maid lying on his bed, he was enraged at her audacity and ordered his servants to give her a lashing. At this the maid started to laugh. Puzzled at her behaviour, the chieftain

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<sup>78</sup> Known to the Greeks as Bactra, Balkh was an ancient city in what is now northern Afghanistan, located some 20 km from the present day city of Mazar-e Sharif.

demanding an explanation for her laughter while she knew very well that she was going to be punished. The maid replied:

“If I deserve a lashing for simply sleeping on the silken bed for a short time, what do you think is going to be done to you for sleeping on this bed for all your life?”

It is said that this reply jolted the nobleman who soon turned to devoting himself entirely to worship.

●

One day, while still living in his palace, Abu bin Adhem was startled out of his sleep by the noise made by a wandering Bedouin. When accosted by Abu bin Adhem, the Bedouin confessed that he was actually looking for his lost camel.

“Do you really believe,” Abu asked, “that you will find your camel in the chieftain’s palace?”

The Bedouin replied, “Abu, if you can find God in this palace, perhaps I can find my camel here.”

It is narrated that these incidents drove Abu bin Adhem to give up his palatial and luxurious life and take to the stark and austere existence in the wilderness where he fully devoted himself to the worship of God and the pursuit of spiritual advancement.

●

Once Abu bin Adhem met a dervish who complained of poverty. Abu remarked that it looked like the dervish had obtained poverty for free. The latter inquired whether poverty was something that could be purchased at all. At this Abu bin Adhem said, “Yes. I have bought poverty in exchange for the kingdom of Balkh, and I think I bought it very cheaply.”

●

Once Abu bin Adhem came across an intoxicated person whose face was covered with wine. Abu bin Adhem took some water and washed his face, saying, “It is not proper for a face to remain sullied that utters the name of God. This is against good manners.”

That night Abu bin Adhem heard God saying to him, “Merely for My sake you cleansed the face of a drunk. In return we have cleansed your heart.”



One day, a person approached Abu bin Adhem and, confessing to a life of sin, wanted Abu’s advice as to what he should do. Abu bin Adhem told him that there were six things which he could follow and act upon and thereafter no sin will ever affect him:

“Firstly,” Abu said, “whenever you commit a sin or act against God’s commandment, you should not eat.” The person said, “How is it possible to live without eating?” Abu replied, “It is not proper to eat God-given provision and then break his commandment.”

“Secondly,” Abu continued, “whenever you are thinking of committing a sin, you should go outside of His dominion to do it.” “That is not possible,” the person exclaimed, “the entire universe belongs to God.” Abu replied, “It is not correct to break His commandment while living in His dominion.”

“Thirdly,” Abu continued, “whenever you intend to commit sin, make sure that God doesn’t see you.” The person remarked that it was not possible since God was aware even of the secrets within human hearts. Abu replied, “When you eat His provision and live in His dominion, then is it fitting to break His commandments right in front of His Eyes?”

“Fourthly,” Abu continued, “when the Angel of Death arrives, ask for some time to repent for your sins.” The person remarked that this, too, was not possible and that the Angel would never listen to him. Abu replied, “If this is the situation, then you should repent before he comes.”

“Fifthly,” Abu continued, “when the Questioning Angels come into your grave, throw them out.” The person said that he had no power to do such a thing. Abu replied, “Then prepare yourself to answer their questions.”

“Sixthly,” Abu continued, “when the judgment is pronounced on the Day of Resurrection and you are being herded towards hell, refuse to go there.” The person said that that would be impossible to do. “Then,” Abu said, “do not commit a sin.”



One day Abu bin Adhem passed by a person who was sitting in a very sad and melancholy mood. Abu asked him if he could ask him three

questions. To this the man replied in the affirmative. Abu asked him, “Does anything happen against the will of God in this universe?” To this the man replied, “No.”

Abu then asked, “Can your daily provisions decrease from what God has decreed?” To this the man again replied, “No.”

Abu then asked, “Can your life end even one moment before what God has decided for you?” The man again replied, “No.”

Abu smiled at the person and asked, “Then why the sadness?”



Once Abu bin Adhem bought a slave and asked him for his name. “Whatever you call me,” the slave replied.

“What will you eat,” Abu bin Adhem inquired.

“Whatever you’ll give me for food,” said the slave.

“What will you wear,” Abu bin Adhem asked.

“Whatever you’ll give me for clothing,” the slave answered.

“What do you desire,” asked Abu bin Adhem.

“What does a servant have to do with his own desire,” responded the slave.

At this Abu bin Adhem began to weep and said to his own self, “All your life you have been a servant of God. Well, now learn what it really means to be a true servant.”<sup>79</sup>



The culmination of Abu bin Adhem’s spiritual quest, which resulted in a vision of his, is best encapsulated and immortalised by a poem written by the British poet, James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784-1859):

Abou ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,  
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,  
An angel writing in a book of gold—

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<sup>79</sup> Fariduddin Attar, *Tadhkiratul Auliya* (translation by A.J. Arberry as: *Memorial of the Saints*), Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
And to the Presence in the room he said:  
“What writest thou?”—The vision raised its head,  
And with a look made of all sweet accord,  
Answered, “The names of those who love the Lord.”

“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so.”  
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerly still, and said, “I pray thee, then,  
Write me as one that loves his fellow men.”<sup>80</sup>

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night  
It came again with a great wakening light,  
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,  
And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.



Here is a humorous anecdote related to the above poem.

Isaac Asimov, the Russian-born American professor of biochemistry at Boston University and the writer of numerous science fiction books, was once queried about the last line of the above poem of James Hunt. Being an atheist, he did not believe in God, angels, miracles, or visions. When asked as to why did the name of Abu bin Adhem led all the rest, Isaac Asimov was perplexed for a moment and then, waving his hands in the air with great emotion, answered, “Simply alphabetical order!”



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<sup>80</sup> This line, “Write me as one that loves his fellow men” is also used as the epitaph on James Henry Leigh Hunt’s own gravestone.

## **Rabia Basri (717-801 C.E.)**

Rabia al-‘Adawiya of Basra<sup>81</sup> is one of the most highly regarded Muslim Sufi saints in Islamic history. She led an extremely austere life and was greatly devoted to God’s worship and love. She was one of the earliest mystics to profess an unselfish love of God—a love that was based neither on potential rewards nor on fear of punishment. This concept was later adopted by many other saints in Islam. Many aspects of her life have now become quite legendary.

●

Born to a poor family, she was captured when travelling in a caravan and sold as a slave. During the day she would tend to the household chores for her master and during the night she would pray as follows:

“Lord! Thou knowest well that my keen desire is to carry out Thy commandments and to serve Thee with all my heart, O Light of my eyes. If I were free, I would pass the whole day and night in prayers. But what should I do when Thou hast made me a slave of a human being?”

Her piety and great love of God impressed her master who set her free.

●

Rabia adopted a life of poverty, asceticism and intense devotion. She is said to have been a disciple of another great mystic from Basra, Hasan Basri, who was considerably senior to her in age. Hasan Basri used to give sermons once every week. If he found that Rabia was not among the listeners, he would shorten his sermon. When someone remarked that other important personages were present and what was so special about a single woman, Hasan Basri responded, “The food that is meant for the vessels of elephants is not fit for the vessels of ants.”

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<sup>81</sup> Built in 636 C.E. during the Caliphate of ‘Umar bin Khattab, Basra is located in southern Iraq. It lies on the Shatt al-Arab River, which constitutes the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. Situated between Kuwait and Iran, Basra is regarded as the site of the ancient city of Sumer.



One day Rabia saw a person with a bandage around his head. Upon being asked, he said that he had a headache. Rabia asked if he had similar headaches in his thirty year life. The person replied in the negative and said that this was the first time that he had this headache. Rabia remarked, “Over a period of thirty years, you never put on a bandage signifying your good health. Now, upon a single day’s illness, you have tied a bandage of complaint on your head.”

●

While her state of poverty and austerity of life were well known to the people, it was for her intense love of God that she really became famous. She brought a uniquely personal perspective to this love of God. Rabia was one of the first Muslim mystics to preach unselfish love of God—love that was free of any temptation of rewards or fear of reprisals; love that was carried out for the sake of love only. Later, this philosophy and perspective was adopted by many mystics in Islam. Rabia used to say:

“I do not serve God for any reward—  
I have no fear of hell or love for paradise—  
I will be a bad servant if I served for material benefit—  
I am duty-bound to serve Him only for His love.”<sup>82</sup>

●

One of her usual prayer used to be:

“O my Lord! If I worship Thee from fear of hell,  
Then burn me therein.  
O Lord! If I worship Thee for hope of paradise,  
Then bar me from its gates.  
But if I worship Thee for Thine own sake,  
Then let me partake of Thine Eternal Beauty.”

●

When people asked her why she maintained such belief, she retorted, “Would God not have the right to be worshipped if Heaven and Hell never

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<sup>82</sup> Ahmad, Jamil, *Hundred Great Muslims*, Feroz Sons Limited, Pakistan 1984.

existed.” She used to say that she will not serve God like a labourer, in expectation of some wages.



Rabia used to offer the following prayer at night on her roof top:

“O my Lord! The stars are shining and the eyes of men are closed and the kings have shut their doors and every lover is along with his beloved and here I am alone with Thee.”



One day, looking at her sullen and gloomy countenance, someone inquired as to what was ailing her and why she didn’t see a physician to cure it. Rabia replied:

“The source of my grief and loneliness is deep in my breast. This is an illness that no physician can cure. Only union with the Friend can cure it.”



Another prayer of Rabia that illustrates the objective of all her supplications is as follows:

“O my God, my concern and my desire in this world is that I should remember Thee above all the things of this world and of the next, that out of all who are in the world, I should meet with Thee.”<sup>83</sup>



The same thought is expressed in another poem of hers:

“O Lord! Whatever share of this world  
You could give to me, give to Your enemies;  
And whatever share of the next world  
You want to give to me, give to Your friends.  
You are enough for me!”<sup>84</sup>



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<sup>83</sup> Fariduddin Attar, *Tadhkiratul Auliya*

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Harvey and Eryk Hanut, *Perfume of the Desert—Inspirations from Sufi Wisdom*, 1999

Whether in ease or in pain, whether sated or hungry, Rabia never asked for anything from another person. When asked by people as to why she didn't seek help from her friends, she replied:

“I should be ashamed to ask for this world's good from Him to Whom it belongs, then why should I seek anything from those to whom it does not belong. Would God forget the poor because of their poverty or remember the rich because of their wealth? He knows my state; there is hardly any need for me to pin-point His attention to it. What He wills, we should also will.”

●

Salih al-Murri of Qazwin was a story-teller and a preacher. He used to teach his disciples: “Whoever knocks at the door continuously, it will be opened to him.”

When Rabia heard this exhortation one day, she remarked, “How long will you keep on saying: ‘It will be opened’? The door you refer to has never been closed.”

●

Sufyan Al-Thauri (716-778), an Islamic scholar and jurist and a friend of Rabia, narrates that once they both prayed in different corners of the mosque for the entire night. When the day was about to break, Sufyan Al-Thauri approached Rabia and said, “How shall we thank God for His grace given to us whereby we spent the whole night in prayer?” Rabia replied, “By fasting tomorrow!”<sup>85</sup>

●

Once a person asked Rabia: “I have committed many sins; if I turn in penitence towards God, will He turn towards me in mercy?”

To this Rabia replied, “No. But if He shall turn towards you in mercy, you will turn towards Him in penitence.”

●

The following poem sums up her love for the real Beloved:

“My peace, O my brothers, is in solitude,

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<sup>85</sup> Fariduddin Attar, *Tadhkiratul Auliya*

And my Beloved is with me, always.  
For His love I can find no substitute,  
And His love is the test for me among mortal beings.  
Whene'er His Beauty I may contemplate,  
He is my "*mihrab*"<sup>86</sup>—towards Him is my "*qibla*"<sup>87</sup>,  
If I die of love, before completing satisfaction,  
Alas, for my anxiety in the world, alas for my distress.  
O Healer, the heart feeds upon its desire,  
The striving after union with Thee has healed my soul;  
O my Joy and my Life abidingly,  
Thou wast the source of my life; from Thee came my ecstasy.  
I have separated myself from all created beings,  
My hope is for union with Thee; that is the goal of my desire."<sup>88</sup>

●

In the following poem Rabia speaks of two kinds of love in which she is engaged:

"I have loved Thee with two loves:  
A selfish love and a love that is worthy.  
As for the love that is selfish,  
I remember Thee to the exclusion of all others.  
As for the love that is worthy of Thee,  
Therein Thou raisest the veil that I may see Thee."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Mihrab* is the semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that faces the *qibla*.

<sup>87</sup> *Qibla* is the direction towards which the Muslims pray—the direction of the Ka'ba in Mecca.

<sup>88</sup> Al-Hurayfish, *Al-Rawd al-Fa'iq*, p 214.

<sup>89</sup> Von Hugel, *Mystical Element of Religion*, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1923

## **Bayazid Bastami (804-878 C.E.)**

Born in Bastam<sup>90</sup>, Iran, and descending from Zoroastrian grandparents, Bayazid is considered to be one of the most well known and influential—although at times controversial—Sufi mystic of the ninth century. He was given to ascetic existence, spending much of his time in isolated retreats.

Bayazid was one of the first Sufis to speak of such terms as: “intoxicated in the love of God”, “annihilation of the self in God”, and “subsistence through God”.

●

One day Bayazid’s teacher, under whom he was studying, told him, “O Abu Yazid, there is a shoemaker in the town. Go, sit with him and listen to him.”

Without questioning the teacher and with no hesitation and pride in his heart, Bayazid went to see the shoemaker. The shoemaker had in fact reached a very high station in spirituality which he hid from the world. On seeing Bayazid, the shoemaker greeted him, “O Abu Yazid, I have been waiting for you for a long time. Come and sit with me.” Then the shoemaker provided spiritual advice to Bayazid and lectured him for several hours. Referring to this incident later in his life, Bayazid used to say:

“What I gained in those three hours and the level that I reached by sitting with this Friend of God, I would never have obtained if I had worshipped day and night from the time of Adam until the Day of Judgment.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Located half way between Tehran and Mashhad in north-eastern Iran, Bastam lies close to the south-eastern tip of the Caspian Sea. It is believed to be founded by Vistahm, the uncle of the famous Sassanid king, Khusrow Parvez.

<sup>91</sup> Field, Claud, *Mystics and Saints of Islam*, Francis Griffiths, London, 1910.

One day while studying at his teacher's house, the teacher suddenly asked Bayazid to fetch a certain book from the shelf on the wall. To this, Bayazid asked, "The shelf? Which shelf?" The teacher responded, "Why, you have been coming here for so long and you have not even noticed the single shelf on the wall?" Bayazid replied, "No. What have I to do with the shelf? I come to you to study and not to look around. When I am in your presence, I close my eyes to everything else."

Hearing this, the teacher advised, "If so, your work is finished here. You can now return to Bastam."

●

When still a child and studying the Qur'an from a teacher, Bayazid learned that a Muslim had duty unto God and duty unto his parents. He immediately came home and told his mother that since it was not possible for him to serve two persons at the same time, he proposed that either his mother should ask the Lord to give him to her, or that she herself should give him to the Lord. At this, her mother decided to give him up unto the Lord and renounced all rights over him. In a few years, Bayazid left home and lived as an ascetic in the deserts of Syria.

Many years later, Bayazid returned to his home and found his mother old and blind. Once again, he resumed serving her. Some time later, Bayazid confided to a friend of his, "What I ought to have known, and what I learned too late, is to serve my mother."

One night, Bayazid's mother called to him to fetch some water. By the time Bayazid brought the water, she had fallen asleep. Not wishing to disturb her sleep, Bayazid stood by her bedside all night with the pitcher of water in his hand. When her mother finally woke up in the morning, she asked why Bayazid had not put down the pitcher. He replied that he wanted to be ready when she asked for it.

Bayazid continues the narration by adding: "That same night the Lord revealed to me all that I wanted to know."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Field, Claud, *Mystics and Saints of Islam*, Francis Griffiths, London, 1910.

Bayazid Bastami never had a regular job or any regular source of income. One day he performed his Prayer behind an Imam. After the Prayer was over, the Imam asked Bayazid Bastami, “You neither work nor ask for money from someone else. How then do you obtain your daily bread?”

To this, Bayazid Bastami replied, “First, let me say my Prayer all over again for I said it behind such a person who does not even know as to who is the Provider of our daily bread!”<sup>93</sup>



Bayazid Bastami once remarked, “Even if God opened up all the gates of heaven upon me and conferred upon me the kingdoms of the two worlds, I would not exchange them for a single sigh that escapes at morning time from the depth of my soul in His love. Nor would I exchange for the entire universe a single breath that I take while aching for Him.”<sup>94</sup>



He used to say that even an iota of God’s love is much better than a thousand palaces in heaven.



Bayazid Bastami used to say that if on the Day of Judgment God would not reveal Himself unto him, he shall raise such a commotion that even the inmates of hell will forget their own plight.



Emphasising the indiscriminate rendering of good, he used to admonish:

“You will not be complete until you are like the earth — both the righteous and the sinner tread upon it; and until you are like the clouds — they shade all things; and until you are like the rain — it waters all things.”



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<sup>93</sup> Fariduddin Attar, *Tadhkiratul Auliya*

<sup>94</sup> Fariduddin Attar, *Tadhkiratul Auliya*

Once Bayazid Bastami remarked, “The attaining of knowledge and information is only useful for such a person who has reached the Knower and the Informer. But someone who attains knowledge for the sake of personal pride or status or station in life, begins to distance himself from God as his knowledge increases.”

●

When people asked Bayazid as to why he spoke so highly of hunger, he replied, “If the Pharaoh would have been hungry, he would never have claimed, ‘I am your Lord, the most high.’ The arrogant ones never gain knowledge of God.”

When people asked him as to who were the arrogant ones, Bayazid replied, “Those who consider their own selves as the best in the whole world.”

●

With respect to the journey unto God, Bayazid—like many other saints—held the belief that one’s own efforts did not amount to much and that everything depended upon the grace of God. In this context he writes:

“For twelve years, I was the blacksmith of my soul. I plunged my soul into the furnace of discipline and burned it in the flames of hard labour; then I placed it on the anvil of reproof and hammered it with the mallet of remorse; I did all this until my soul was fashioned into a mirror. Then I polished that mirror with every possible act of worship and godly service. Then I finally looked at my own self in that mirror. And lo, I saw about my waist an infidel girdle of delusion and self-esteem. This was so because I relied on my own actions and approved of my own conduct.”

The same thought is elegantly expressed by the Persian mystic poet, Muhammad Shirin Maghribi<sup>95</sup> (1346-1406), who said:

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<sup>95</sup> Muhammad Shirin Al-Maghribi was one of the most important Persian language poets who came after Iraki (d. 1289), Anwari (d. 1433) and Mahmud Shabistari (d. 1440). Al-Maghribi belonged to the Ibn al-‘Arabi’s school and the main theme of his poetry is devoted to Oneness of Being (*Wahdat al-Wujud*).



“No one by himself can find the path to Him;  
Whoever gets to His street, goes with His feet.”

Jalaluddin Rumi, the thirteenth century Sufi poet, expresses the same thought in his couplet, as follows:

“Not a single lover would seek union  
If the Beloved were not seeking it.”

●

Once Bayazid was readying to embark upon the pilgrimage when a person came and asked him as to where he was going. Bayazid replied, “I am going to Mecca to make the circuits of the Ka‘ba.” The person asked him as to how much money he had. Bayazid replied, “Two hundred pieces of gold.”

“Very well,” the person said, “give them to me and walk seven times around me. This act of charity will earn you greater reward than your pilgrimage to the Ka‘ba.”

Bayazid says that he did as the person had asked and did not make the pilgrimage that year.<sup>96</sup>

●

Once a person asked for a piece of Bayazid’s cloak, seeking to obtain God’s blessings through it. Bayazid replied, “Although you may strip Bayazid of his skin, and clothe yourself with it, it will give you no benefit unless you carry out the actions of Bayazid.”

●

Speaking of his spiritual journey, Bayazid states that he stood with the pious and did not find any progress with them; he stood with the warriors and did not find a single step of progress with them. Then once he saw the Lord in his dream and asked Him, “How am I to find you?”

The Lord replied, “Leave your self and come!”

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<sup>96</sup> Field, Claud, *Mystics and Saints of Islam*, Francis Griffiths, London, 1910.

Bayazid narrates that one day he heard a voice that said, “O Bayazid, Our treasure house is full with acts of devotion and adoration offered by men; bring us something which is not in Our treasury.” At this, he asked, “O God, what then shall I bring?” The voice answered, “Bring Me humility, contrition and aching of the heart.”

●

All saints and Sufi masters have promoted this philosophy that on the path of God, sacrificing of the self and the killing of one’s ego is the first step. The fact that Bayazid had achieved this station and had totally sacrificed his own self, is shown by an interesting incident in his life:

One day a man came to the house of Bayazid and knocked on the door. “Whom are you seeking?” asked Bayazid.

“Bayazid,” replied the man.

“Poor wretch,” said Bayazid. “I have been seeking him for thirty years and cannot find any trace of him.”

●

Service to humanity was so dear to Bayazid’s heart that he could not bear to stand the suffering of anyone. He was particularly grieved to think of what would happen to the sinners on the Day of Judgment. Thus, he would frequently give the following admonition to his own disciples:

“Those only are my disciples who, on the Day of Judgment, will stand on the brink of hell in order to seize and save the wretches cast therein, even if they had to enter hell itself to save the others.”

●

Speaking of one of his spiritual experiences, Bayazid narrates that once he arrived at the station of Nearness when a voice said to him, “O Bayazid, ask what you have to ask.” Bayazid replied, “My God, Thou art the Object of my desire.” The voice replied, “O Bayazid, if there lingers in thee an atom of worldly desire, and till you are reduced to nothing in the station of annihilation, thou cannot find Me.”

Not wishing to return empty-handed, Bayazid asked, “Then grant me mercy for all men.” The voice asked Bayazid to lift up his eyes whereupon he saw that the Most High was already inclined to have mercy on His servants and did not need to be asked by Bayazid. At this Bayazid cried

out, “Lord, have mercy on Satan.” The voice then answered, “Satan is made of fire and it needs to return to fire. Take heed lest thou thyself may end up there.”<sup>97</sup>



Once narrating a deep spiritual experience of his, Bayazid Bastami remarked that at the end of the vision he felt that he had achieved the highest level of sainthood. Yet, he felt that what he had achieved was just but the lowest level of prophethood. The highest level of prophethood, he remarked, had no limit.



Bayazid lived for over seventy years. Before his death, someone asked him his age. He said, “I am four years old. For seventy years I was veiled. I got rid of my veils only four years ago!”



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<sup>97</sup> Field, Claud, *Mystics and Saints of Islam*, Francis Griffiths, London, 1910.

## **Junaid Baghdadi (830-910 C.E.)**

Born in Baghdad, Iraq, Abul-Qasim al-Junaid was one of the most well regarded medieval Sufi saints of Islam and many anecdotes are related about him. He had a great many disciples in his own time and many Sufi saints continued to pay him homage after his death.



Once, Junaid had this desire to meet Iblis<sup>98</sup> face to face. One day he saw an ugly man coming towards him in the street and he knew in his heart that this was Iblis. When the person approached Junaid, he said, “You wanted to see me, Junaid?”

The latter replied, “I have always wondered as to how you could possibly disobey the command of God when He asked you to prostrate yourself in front of Adam.”

Iblis smiled and said, “You see, Junaid, how could I possibly prostrate myself in front of someone *other* than God Himself?”

Junaid narrates that he was taken aback by this answer but soon the reality was intimated to his heart and he addressed Iblis:

“The command of God over-rides all other considerations.”

Hearing this, the person departed screaming that Junaid had scorched him.



Once, Junaid met a person who had just returned from the pilgrimage. The following conversation took place between the two:

Junaid asked him, “Since you started your journey from home, did you also journey away from all the sins?” The person said, “No.” Junaid remarked, “Then you have made no journey.”

Junaid then asked, “At every stage that you halted for the night, did you traverse a station on the way to God?” The man replied, “No.” Junaid said, “Then you have not trodden the road stage by stage.”

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<sup>98</sup> Devil, Diablo, or Satan.

Junaid then asked, “When you put on the pilgrim’s garb and discarded all your clothing, did you also discard your human weaknesses?” The man said, “No.” Junaid remarked, “Then you did not put on the pilgrim’s garb.”

Junaid then asked, “When you stood at ‘Arafat, did you contemplate God?” The man replied, “No.” Junaid remarked, “Then you have not stood at ‘Arafat.”

Junaid then asked, “When you went to Muzdalifa and achieved your desire, did you renounce all your carnal desires?” The man said, “No.” Junaid remarked, “Then you have not gone to Muzdalifa.”

Junaid then asked, “When you circled around the Ka‘ba, did you behold the beauty of God?” The man replied, “No.” Junaid remarked, “Then you have not circled the Ka‘ba.”

Junaid then asked, “When you reached the place of sacrifice, did you sacrifice all your worldly desires?” The man said, “No.” Junaid remarked, “Then you have not made your sacrifice.”

Junaid then asked, “When you threw the pebbles, did you also throw away all the sensual thoughts that were accompanying you?” The man replied, “No.” Junaid said, “Then you have not yet thrown the pebbles. And from all your answers I gather that you have not really performed your pilgrimage yet!”



The Persian Sufi mystic, Abu Bakr Shibli (861-946), wanted to become a disciple of Junaid and said to him, “You have been recommended to me as an expert on finding pearls (meaning wisdom and enlightenment). Either sell them to me, or give them to me.”

Junaid replied, “If I sell them to you, you do not have the price to pay for them. If I give them to you free, you would not appreciate their value, having come by them so easily. I suggest that you do like me; plunge head-first into the sea of knowledge and obtain the pearls for yourselves.”



Junaid spent a lifetime in meditation, prayers and solitary retreats. He sums up this spiritual pursuit in his own words as follows: “For thirty

years, I sat watching over my heart,” he writes. “Then for ten years my heart watched over me. Now it has been twenty years that I know nothing of my heart and my heart knows nothing of me. For thirty years, God has spoken with Junaid by the tongue of Junaid, Junaid not being there at all, and men were not aware of it.”<sup>99</sup>



It is reported that before his death, Junaid ordered that all sayings and pronouncements attributed to him and which people had widely written and recorded, be burned down and destroyed. When people asked him the reason for this, he replied: “When the people already have with them the knowledge given by the Messenger of God, I wish to meet God Almighty in such a state that there remains nothing attributed to me.”<sup>100</sup>



When the time of his death approached, Junaid performed the ablutions and fell into prostration. The people around him questioned this act of his as he had spent his entire life in the worship of God. At this, he replied, “Junaid is now more needy of God’s forgiveness than ever before. I find my seventy years of worship hung by a thread on a line, with a strong wind blowing around it. I do not know if it is the wind of separation or of joining.” Then he started to read *Tasbih* (praise of God) as he gave up his life.

It is said that when the people who were bathing him, tried to wash his eyes, they heard a voice saying, “Remove your hand from My friend’s eyes because the eye that did not close due to My remembrance, shall now open only to see Me.”



A person saw Junaid in his dream after the latter had passed away from this world. He asked him as to how *Munkar* and *Nakeer* (the Questioning Angels) had treated him. Junaid replied, “They asked me:

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<sup>99</sup> As reported by [www.the.sufi.com/Sufi\\_biographies\\_and\\_stories/Abol-Qasem-al-Jonaid.htm](http://www.the.sufi.com/Sufi_biographies_and_stories/Abol-Qasem-al-Jonaid.htm)

<sup>100</sup> As reported by [www.sunnah.org/history/Scholars/imam\\_junayd.htm](http://www.sunnah.org/history/Scholars/imam_junayd.htm)

‘Who is your Lord?’ I laughed as I said to them that the Lord has already asked me that question, ‘*Alastu birabbikum*’<sup>101</sup> (Am I not your Lord?) and that I have already answered Him, ‘*Bala*’ (Yes), and now you come and ask me who is my Lord. I say this, ‘*Allazi khalaqani fahuwa yahdin*’<sup>102</sup> (the One who has created me, it is He Who guides me). Thus, they left me saying that I was still intoxicated in love.”

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<sup>101</sup> Surah *Al-A'raf*, 7:173: “And when thy Lord brings forth from Adam’s children—outh of their loins—their offspring and makes them witnesses against their own selves *by saying*: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ they say, ‘Yes, we do bear witness.’”

<sup>102</sup> Surah *Al-Shu'ara*, 26:79

## **Abul Hasan Kharqani (963-1033 C.E.)**

Born at Kharqan<sup>103</sup> in the Khorasan<sup>104</sup> region of Iran, Abul Hasan Kharqani closely followed the mystic teachings of Bayazid Bastami who lived a century before him. Fariduddin Attar, the writer of *Tadhkiratul Auliya*, devotes a generous section on Kharqani, and the Persian poets Jalaluddin Rumi and Jami have written several poems in his praise. The disciples of Kharqani included such notable persons as Avicenna (the great scientist), Mahmud Ghaznavi (the King of Ghazna), and Abu Sa'id Abul Khair (the great mystic of the eleventh century). Although Kharqani was not formally educated, his insightful sayings and speeches were treasured by the listeners.



It is reported that whenever the Sufi saint, Bayazid Bastami (804-878), visited the land of Kharqan, he would inhale deeply as if trying to smell something. Once a disciple of his asked him about this action of his to which Bayazid replied, "I smell the fragrance of a man of God from this land of Kharqan." Jalaluddin Rumi versified the reply of Bayazid in his *Mathnawi*, in the following words:

"After a few years a king shall be born,  
Whose flight shall be upon the sky;  
His countenance will be like a flower from the garden of Truth,  
And he shall be higher than me in station and position.  
What is his name? His name is Abul Hasan,  
And his eye-brow and chin will be beautiful."



Once Abul Hasan Kharqani was commenting about the radiant face of Bayazid Bastami who had lived nearly a century before him. He said that

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<sup>103</sup> Kharqan lies in the Bastam District of Semnan Province of north-eastern Iran.

<sup>104</sup> Lying in the north-eastern region of Iran, historical Khorasan referred to a much larger area that also included areas east and north-east of the Persian Empire. In the Persian language, Khorasan means "where the sun arrives from."



Bayazid's face was so radiant that whoever looked at it had the knots of disbelief untied in his heart. One person listening to this raised an immediate objection saying, "When Abu Jahl looked at the face of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, he did not have his own knots of disbelief untied. So, how can you say the face of Bayazid could accomplish this?"

Abul Hasan Kharqani retorted, "O ignorant one, when did Abu Jahl look at the radiant face of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>?"

The questioner was taken aback and asked incredulously, "They lived in the same place; how could Abu Jahl fail to look at the face of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>?"

Abul Hasan Kharqani replied, "Abu Jahl only looked at the face of Muhammad bin Abdullah. Had he ever looked at the face of Muhammad the Messenger of God, all his disbelief would have disappeared and he would not have remained bereft of guidance."

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Abul Hasan Kharqani had the highest regard for Bayazid Bastami who had foretold the advent of the former. It is reported that for some twenty years, Abul Hasan Kharqani visited the grave of Bayazid on a daily basis and prayed in these words, "O God, bestow upon me the same rank that Thou hast bestowed upon Bayazid Bastami." Abul Hasan Kharqani used to say: "In the whole world only one person could understand me, and it was Bayazid."

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One night when Kharqani was praying, he heard a voice say, "O Abul Hasan! Do you want me to tell the people what I know of you, that they may stone you to death?"

To this Kharqani responded, "O Lord! Do you wish me to tell the people of what I know of *Your* mercy and grace, that none of them may ever bow to You in prayer?"

The voice replied, "You keep your secret and I shall keep Mine!"<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A., *The Mystics of Islam*, published by Arkana, 1989

Sincere regard and love for the fellow being was very close to the heart of Abul Hasan Kharqani who was devoted to the wellbeing of the people around him. He often used to say: “A scholar wakes up in the morning and seeks to increase his knowledge. A pious one wakes up and seeks to increase his faith. But Abul Hasan wakes up to see how he can make a human being happy.”



Once Abul Hasan Kharqani wondered aloud, “What if there was neither hell nor heaven, so that we could see the real devout person!”



Commenting on the human heart, Abul Hasan Kharqani remarked: “What is the best thing? It is the heart which is always in remembrance of God. The best of hearts is the one which contains nothing but the presence of God—Almighty and Exalted. Today, it will have been forty years that God has been looking in my heart and has seen nothing except Himself. I have had nothing in my heart or in my breast except God for forty years; and while my ego is asking for cold water and a drink of milk, I have not allowed it that for forty years in order to control myself. The vision with the eyes of the head does not bring happiness, but the vision with the eyes of the heart and the secret that Allah gives to the soul will bring out that happiness.”



## **Abu Sa‘id Abul Khair (967-1049 C.E.)**

Being a contemporary of two well-known Sufi scholars—Abul Hasan Kharqani and Ali Hujwari—and of the noted philosopher and scientist, Avicenna, Abu Sa‘id was a Persian Sufi born in Mayhana, a town near Sarkhs in the former Soviet republic of Turkmenistan.

Much of what is known about him comes from *Asrar al-Tauhid* (Mysteries of Unification), written by his grandson, Muhammad ibn Munawer. Abu Sa‘id spent most of his life in the Iranian city of Nishapur and was well known for his mystic philosophy, performing of *karamaats* (miracles) and writing of Persian Sufi poetry. His primary emphasis was on the negation of the self, which he considered to be the main obstacle on the path of finding God. It is said that he never referred to himself with the pronoun “I” or “we” but preferred to use the more neutral and indirect “he” or “they” instead.

He remained a somewhat controversial figure during his lifetime. His enjoyment of feasts, his delight in devotional singing, his radical statements regarding the Pilgrimage, his use of poetry in public sermons and his mystical interpretations of Qur’anic verses, brought on considerable criticism from the public. However, his eminence in society was such that these failed to damage his reputation.

Abu Sa‘id thought very highly of Bayazid Bastami (804-876) and Mansur Hallaj (858-922) and in turn, Fariduddin Attar (1145-1221), the writer of *Tadhkiratul Auliya*, thinks very highly of Abu Sa‘id Abul-Khair and calls him his spiritual teacher.



Humility and meekness is the hallmark of all Sufis and Abu Sa‘id was no exception. He often used to say, “When God wishes to benefit a man, He shows him the path of self-abasement.” To seek such humility, Abu Sa‘id used to serve and wait upon the dervishes, cleaning their cells and the lavatories.



All saints and Sufi masters have advocated that on the path of God, the one most important thing that the seeker needs to do is to sacrifice the self. In this context, Abu Sa'id taught that:

“The seeking of God means dropping all pretensions. And there is no pretension that is greater than importance of your own self. The moment that you get involved with your ego, you are cut off from Him.”

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The mind of the seeker is focused on God, so much so that nothing really exists for him other than God. The mystic is totally resigned to the will of God and cheerfully accepts all events that are determined by divine Providence. Abu Sa'id used to say, “The Sufi is he who is pleased with all that God does, in order that God may be pleased with all that he does.” He often used to pray: “O God! Whatever comes from me to Thee, I beseech Thee to forgive; and whatever comes from Thee to me, Thine is the praise!”

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Men of God have taken different paths unto Him: there is the path of self-abasement, the path of servitude, the path of knowledge, and the path of martyrdom, to name a few. Yet, all paths are strewn with thorns and are hard to climb. In this context, Abu Sa'id makes the following remark: “Innumerable are the ways of God, yet the Way is but a single step. Take one step out of thyself that thou mayst arrive at God.”

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While a devout mystic himself, Abu Sa'id did not believe in being a hermit and isolating himself from fellow beings. He used to say, “The perfect mystic is not a saintly recluse shunning all commerce with mankind. The true saint goes in and out amongst the people and eats and sleeps with them in social interaction, and never forgets God for a single moment.”

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One of the most apparent aspects of Abu Sa'id's character was his constant striving to bring happiness to other people. He often used to say, “There is no better and easier means of reaching God than by bringing joy

to the heart of a Muslim.” He also used to quote Abul Abbas Bashar: “When a disciple performs an act of kindness to a dervish, it is better for him than a hundred *rak’as*<sup>106</sup> of Prayer; and if he gives him a mouthful of food, it is better for him than a whole night spent in prayer.”



Abu Sa‘id was very kind at heart and extremely mindful of the pain and suffering of other human beings. In his sermons and discourses, he would generally avoid dwelling on the torments and punishments of Hell. In his last years, he used to pray: “O God! Inasmuch as men and stones have the same value in Thy sight, feed the flames of Hell with stones and do not burn these miserable wretches!”<sup>107</sup>



Abu Sa‘id was totally lost in the love of God and many of his Persian poems attest to this. Following is a short poem in this context:

“Love came and flew as blood in my veins—  
Emptied me of myself and filled me with the Beloved.  
Each part of my being she conquered—  
Now a mere name is left of me and the rest is she.”



Talking about sin, Abu Sa‘id makes a very interesting observation: “Had there been no sinners, God’s mercy would have been wasted. Adam would not have been visited with the tribulation of sin unless forgiveness was the dearest of all things to God.”<sup>108</sup>



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<sup>106</sup> *Rak’at* (genuflection) literally means bending of the knees or bowing, usually in reverence or in Prayer.

<sup>107</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A., *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, 1967

<sup>108</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A., *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, 1967

Abu Sa'id's mind was illuminated by the direct light of revelation that he used to receive from God. One day when he was giving a particular discourse, a theologian pointed out that that particular concept was not present in the seven sevenths (the entirety) of the Qur'an. To this Abu Sa'id replied, "The doctrine that I am talking about is contained in the eighth seventh of the Qur'an." "And what is that?" the theologian inquired. Abu Sa'id explained, "The seven sevenths are: 'O Messenger! Convey what has been revealed to thee from thy Lord...' <sup>109</sup>, and the eighth seventh is: 'Then He revealed to His servant that which He revealed.' <sup>110</sup> You imagine that the word of God is of fixed measure and extent. It is not so. It is infinite. That which He causes to come into the hearts of His servants does not admit of being numbered and limited, nor does it ever cease. Every moment a messenger comes from Him to the hearts of His servants, as the Prophet himself declared: 'Beware of the clairvoyance (*firasa*) of the true believer, for verily he sees by the light of God.'"<sup>111</sup>

Referring to the infinite wisdom and knowledge of God, Abu Sa'id quotes the following Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>:

"The Guarded Tablet (*lauh-i mahfuz*)<sup>112</sup> is so broad that a fleet of Arab horses would not be able to cross it in four years, and the writing thereon is finer than a hair. Of all the writing which covers it only a single line has been communicated to God's creatures. That little keeps them in perplexity until the Day of Resurrection. As for the rest, no one knows anything about it."

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<sup>109</sup> Surah *Al-Ma'idah*, 5:68.

<sup>110</sup> Surah *Al-Najm*, 53:11.

<sup>111</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A., *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, 1967

<sup>112</sup> *Lauh al-Mahfuz*, literally meaning the Guarded Tablet (Surah *Al-Buruj*, 84:22-23), refers to God's knowledge or the entirety of all events that will take place until the Last Day.

Occasionally, Abu Sa‘id displayed a sense of humour in his otherwise very serious and staid disposition. One day, having been told that a disciple of his was lying drunk on a certain road, Abu Sa‘id remarked, “Thank God that he has fallen on the way, not off the Way!” When someone asked him: “Are the men of God to be found in the mosque?” Abu Sa‘id replied, “They are in the tavern, too.”



Following are some examples of the philosophy and mysticism expressed in Abu Sa‘id’s Persian poems:

“Hymns are for the angels; the purity is for Rizwan<sup>113</sup>;  
Hell is for the bad; Paradise is for the noble;  
Precious things are for Jamshaid, Kaiser and Khaqan<sup>114</sup>;  
The Beloved is for us; and our life is for the Beloved.”

“Where is union with Thee, and where is my afflicted separation;  
Where is the precious pearl, and where is the courage of the ant;  
Although I am not fearful of getting burned—  
But where is the moth and where the fire of the Mountain of Tur<sup>115</sup>”

“Come back! Come back! Whosoever thou art, come back!  
Come back though thou art a disbeliever, or a Jew or an idolater.  
This court of Ours is not the court of disappointment; even if  
You have breached your repentance a hundred times, come back.”

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<sup>113</sup> According to Islamic traditions, Rizwan is an angel appointed at the gates of Heaven. The name is also spelled as: Ridwan.

<sup>114</sup> Various kings: Jamshaid is a mythical king in the Iranian culture; Kaiser is the equivalent of Caesar in the Arabic and Persian languages and is used for kings of the Roman or Eastern Roman Empire; Khaqan is a title of imperial rank in the Mongolian and Turkic languages, equivalent to the status of emperor.

<sup>115</sup> *Koh-e Tur*, or the Mountain of Tur, is the mountain where God spoke with Moses.

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

“I cannot rest a single moment without Thee;  
Thy bounties unto me I cannot reckon;  
If every hair on my head should be a tongue,  
Not a thousandth part of Thy favours can I thank.”



Before his death, Abu Sa‘id requested that the following verses be read over his dead body:

“What is sweeter than this in the world?  
Friend met with the Friend; the lover joined with the Beloved!  
That was all sorrow, this is all joy;  
Those were all words; this is all reality.”



Abu Sa‘id passed away in Mayhana, the place of his birth, at the age of eighty-three years. His tomb bears the following lines that he chose himself for his epitaph:

“I beg, nay, charge thee to write upon my gravestone:  
‘*This was love’s bondsman,*’ that when I am gone,  
Some wretch well-versed in passion’s ways may sigh  
And give me greeting, as he passes by.”<sup>116</sup>



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<sup>116</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A., *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, 1967



## **Abul Hasan Ali Hujweri (990-1077 C.E.)**

Known popularly in the Indian subcontinent by his epithet Data Ganj Bakhsh (the master who bestows treasures), Abul Hasan Ali Hujweri was born in Ghazna<sup>117</sup>, Afghanistan but lies buried in Lahore, Pakistan. He is considered a great Sufi and a scholar of Islam and helped a great deal in the spreading of Islam in the subcontinent of India and Pakistan.



Before arriving in India in 1039 C.E., Abul Hasan Hujweri had travelled widely in the Islamic lands to gain knowledge from the great scholars and Sufi masters of the time. Upon the advice of his spiritual master at the time, Abul Hasan came to Lahore to replace Shaikh Husain Zanjani who had just passed away. Abul Hasan Hujweri lies buried in Lahore and his tomb witnesses a constant stream of visitors. When Mu‘inuddin Chishti came to India, he first arrived at the tomb of Ali Hujweri and prayed there for several days. It was here that he paid homage to the illustrious saint in his well known Persian couplet:

*Ganj Bakhsh fayz-e aalam mazhar-e noor-e Khuda  
Naqisan ra pir-e kaamil, kamlan ra rahnuma*

“Ganj Bakhsh is a manifestation of the Light of God  
A perfect guide for the imperfect ones; a guide unto the perfect ones”



Ali Hujweri used to pray to God as follows: “O God! First bestow upon me goods that I may render thanks for them; and then help me abstain from them for Thy sake—that my poverty may be voluntary, not imposed.”



Writing about the death of his spiritual master, Abul Fazl Al-Khuttali of Syria, Ali Hujweri writes that at the time of dying his head was resting

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<sup>117</sup> Ghazna is a province of Afghanistan, located in the south-eastern part of the country, not far from the border with Pakistan. Its ancient name, Ghzank, is derived from Persian and Sanskrit languages and means ‘treasure’.

against his pupil's chest when he said to him, "O my son, I will tell thee of one article of belief which, if thou holdest it firmly, will deliver thee from all troubles. Whatever good or evil God creates, do not in any way or circumstance quarrel with His action or be aggrieved in thy heart."

Saying this, Ali Hujwari writes, his spiritual master gave up his soul.



Ali Hujwari is best known today for his book *Kashful Mahjub* (the unveiling of the Veiled) which is considered an authority and a text book in the field of Islamic mysticism. Written in Persian, the book was produced at the request of a student as a guide for the Sufi aspirants. The book lays out the foundation of the science of mysticism and quotes liberal examples from the life of the Prophet, his Companions and the early Muslim saints. The book also incorporates extensive analysis and spiritual experiences of the writer himself.



The following accounts are taken from Ali Hujwari's book, *Kashful Mahjub*:

When Abraham was about to be thrown into the fire at the order of the king, the angel Gabriel asked him, "Do you need anything?" Abraham answered, "Not from you." At this, the angel Gabriel said, "Then ask for help from God." Abraham said, "He knows my condition and knows what is best for me."



One day, Abdullah bin Ja'far (d. 680), the son of Ja'far bin Abu Talib, was passing by an orchard when he saw an Abyssinian slave grazing some goats and sheep on behalf of his master. At that moment, a dog came and sat down in front of the slave. The slave gave the dog first one piece of bread and then the second and then his last one. Seeing this, Abdullah bin Ja'far inquired from the slave as to his daily ration. The slave replied, "Just these three pieces of bread." Abdullah bin Ja'far asked, "Why did you give all of it to the dog?" The slave answered, "This dog is not from here. He has travelled from some faraway place on the hope of getting some food. I did not feel that his effort should be wasted." Abdullah bin

Ja'far liked this answer of the slave so much that he bought the slave, the animals and the orchard from his master and, setting the slave free, gave everything to him as a present. It is reported that the slave thanked Abdullah bin Ja'far, gave away the animals and the orchard in charity, and left the place.



It is narrated that Sari al-Saqati (d. 867), a Sufi mystic and the uncle of Junaid Baghdadi, prayed as follows: "O God! Whatever punishment Thou mayest inflict on me, pray do not punish me with the humiliation of being veiled from Thee... There is no punishment in Hell more painful than that of being veiled. If God were revealed to the people of Hell, the sinful would never think of Paradise... And in Paradise, there is no pleasure more perfect than unveiledness. If the people of Paradise were veiled from God, their hearts will be utterly broken."<sup>118</sup>



Habib 'Ajmi was a 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century Sufi mystic of Islam who had achieved nearness to God but his recitation of Arabic was not perfect. One day, Hasan al-Basri happened to visit him at his home and found him getting ready to say his evening Prayer. Hearing his recitation, Hasan Basri did not say his Prayer behind him but performed it separately. That night, Hasan Basri saw God in his dream and asked Him, "O God, where does Your pleasure lie?" It was said, "O Hasan, you received My pleasure but you did not recognise its worth." Hasan inquired as to how that happened. It was said, "By not saying your Prayer behind Habib 'Ajmi. That single Prayer may have been as rewarding as all your other Prayers. You paid attention to the correctness of his pronunciation but not to the truthfulness of his intention!"



When the time of his death drew near, it is said that Habib 'Ajmi was terribly frightened. When people asked him for the reason, Habib 'Ajmi replied, "The journey is long and I have no provisions... I am afraid that I

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<sup>118</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A., *The Mystics of Islam*, Arkana, 1989

may be called upon to bring forth one *Tasbih* (praise of God) that I have said in life that is free from any interference from Satan—then what will I do?”<sup>119</sup>

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It is narrated that Bashar Hafi (d. 842) never wore any footwear, hence the epithet Hafi, meaning barefooted one. When the people asked him for this particular trait of his, he replied, “The earth is God’s flooring. I do not wish to walk in such a condition that there is something that lies between my feet and His flooring.”

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Abul-Qasim Qushairi of Nishapur (d. 1074), a contemporary of Ali Hujwari, used to say:

“With respect to poverty and independence, I accept for myself whatever God wills for me. If He makes me wealthy, then I must not remain unheeding. And if He makes me poor, then I must not remain greedy. Thus, independence is a blessing but being unheeding in it is a calamity. Similarly, poverty is a blessing but greed and ingratitude in it is fatal... A poor is not one whose hand is empty of all worldly goods and means but one who has no desire for worldly goods and means!”

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Referring to the incident of the *Mi‘raj* (ascent to heaven), ‘A’isha narrates that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> never saw God during his journey. Referring to the same incident, Abdullah bin Abbas narrates that the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> did see God. Ali Hujwari explains that there is no contradiction between the two narrations. When ‘A’isha stated that the Prophet did not see God, she meant that he did not see God with his physical eyes. When Abdullah bin Abbas stated that the Prophet saw God, he meant that he saw Him with his inner eye.

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<sup>119</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (translated by Henry Augustus Homes)

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

Muhammad ibn Wasi', an eighth century Islamic scholar who was known for his asceticism, said: "I never saw anything without seeing God therein."

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Abu Bakr Shibli (861-946), a Persian Sufi mystic, said, "I never saw anything except God."

●

Some people asked a saint, "Do you wish to see God?" He replied in the negative. When the people asked him as to why not, the saint answered: "When Moses desired to see God, he did not succeed. The Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, on the other hand, saw God without even making a request. Thus, our wishing itself becomes a veil and a hindrance for seeing God."

●

The ultimate tribute to the greatness of Ali Hujweri is paid by Carl W. Ernst (born 1950) who is Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of North Carolina. He writes:

"It has been said that those who seek a guide in Sufism should do three things: pray for guidance, visit the tombs of the great Shaikhs, and read *Kashful Mahjub*."

●

## **Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 C.E.)**

Of Persian origin, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali was perhaps the most influential and most noted scholar and mystic of Islam. Known as Algazel in the West, Al-Ghazali's influence extended to such Christian personages as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Much of his life was devoted in sermonising and lecturing people. However, late in his life, he withdrew from public life and spent the last five years in practical seclusion.

After studying Greek philosophy and natural sciences in his early life, he had a change of heart and devoted himself entirely to the pursuit of mysticism. His greatest influence on the Islamic world came through his bold denunciation of the Muslim philosophers—such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Farabi (Alpharabius)—who were masters of Aristotelian philosophy. In this respect, Al-Ghazali's famous book, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* marked a major watershed in the attitude of the Muslims towards the pursuit of Greek philosophy and natural sciences. Almost overnight, these pursuits in which Muslims were expanding new horizons, went out of fashion, only to be replaced with greater emphasis on mysticism and Islamic sciences. Although Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), known in the West as Averroes, tried very hard to revive the pursuit of Greek philosophy and natural sciences and denounced Al-Ghazali's anti-philosophy writings through his own book, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, it was a case of being too little, too late.

Al-Ghazali has authored many books, the most famous being *Ihya' Uloomuddin* (The Revival of Religious Knowledge). Many of Al-Ghazali's writings are focused on formalising the concept of mysticism in Islam and on the subject of love of God. His discourses are very deep in meaning, very elegant in form, and very comprehensive in scope.



In his book, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, Al-Ghazali describes the following seven signs of love of God by which the individual can determine the sincerity of his own feelings:

### *Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

“The first sign of love of God is not to be afraid of death, and to be always waiting for it.

The second sign of the love of God is when a person forsakes whatever turns him away from Him and chooses whatever draws him near to Him.

The third sign of the love of God is that the remembrance of God is always fresh in his heart—he never ceases to meditate upon God.

The fourth sign of the love of God is to love and respect the Qur’an—the Word of God—and to love all humanity—the creation of God.

The fifth sign of the love of God is to choose a retreat and secret place to pray—away from the eyes of other persons.

The sixth sign of the love of God is when a person finds worship of God to be easy, inviting and delightful.

The seventh sign of the love of God is that a person loves the sincere friends and obedient servants of God and regards them all as his own friends.”<sup>120</sup>



On the subject of beauty and its link with the Divine source, Al-Ghazali offers the following philosophy:

“It is clear then that the beauty of form possessed by man and the beauty of many other things arise from their being created from the light of the Lord. If such beauty and elegance exist in spirits formed out of one drop of the light of the blessed God, what must be the beauty and splendour of the Lord God Himself. Since the beauty of every object is derived from His light, it follows that the wise should not be deceived by any fleeting beauty but should turn to the contemplation of that Painter who is full of all perfection and should earnestly seek after the vision of His beauty and for union with him.”



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<sup>120</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (translated by Henry Augustus Homes)

Referring to his own search of God, Al-Ghazali used to say:

“I want union with Him and He wants separation; thus I leave what I want, so that His wish comes true.”

●

On the path of seeking God, Al-Ghazali advocates total submission to His will. On this difficult journey, Al-Ghazali recognises three phases that represent increasing degrees of our relationship with Him.

He likens the first phase to the relationship that one has with one’s lawyer who has the power of attorney to represent the individual in a certain matter. While the individual trusts the attorney fully, he still retains the right to make the final decision.

Al-Ghazali likens the second phase to the relationship a child has with his mother. The child completely trusts the mother but communicates with speech and crying only when he wants something. While being a more complete submission than between man and his attorney, the child-mother relationship is still driven by greed and selfishness.

The third and highest phase of our relationship with God is likened by Al-Ghazali to the relationship that exists between a corpse and the washer who is preparing it for burial. The washer does as he wills and the corpse does not utter a word of complaint. In this last phase of our relationship with God, only His will matters—our will has no existence.<sup>121</sup>

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The following are some poems of Al-Ghazali on the subject of love of God:

“I have made a home for Thy love in my heart,  
While affection for something else hovers around the home.  
But it is folly to have friendship with aught else than Thy beauty,  
For there is none to be loved but the eternal Friend.  
He who has made Thee to be his happiness and refuge,

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<sup>121</sup> Lapadius, Ira M., *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.



*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

Has already joined himself to the perfect excellence.”<sup>122</sup>



“Separation from Thee, would quickly destroy me,  
Separation from one’s friends is fatal.  
If Thou shouldst separate from me still would I  
Be occupied with Thee, ever active Friend,  
Who art the object of my desires and my searches;  
For Thou wilt not turn away from him who loves Thee.”<sup>123</sup>



“It is in vain that the eyes watch for any other love than Thee;  
It is a loss for the eyes to weep for any other friend;  
Thou art the true Friend! If Thou deign to look upon me,  
It will be well with me, as if my eyes had never wept.”<sup>124</sup>



“What shall I do with life that’s not passed in remembrance of  
Thee?  
What shall I do with the eye that’s not sad with longing after  
Thee?  
What shall I do with the heart that’s not the home of Thy love?  
What shall I do with the soul that does not make a sacrifice in  
Thy way?”<sup>125</sup>



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<sup>122</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (translated by Henry Augustus Homes)

<sup>123</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (translated by Henry Augustus Homes)

<sup>124</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (translated by Henry Augustus Homes)

<sup>125</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (translated by Henry Augustus Homes)

## **Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166 C.E.)**

Born in the province of Jilan<sup>126</sup>, Iran, Abdul Qadir Jilani became one of the highest ranked Sufi saints in Islamic mysticism and laid the foundation of the Qadiriya Order (*tariqa*) for spiritual advancement. He spent most of his life in Baghdad where he died and is buried.

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Here is an interesting story about the marriage of Abdul Qadir Jilani's parents, Abu Saleh and Fatima. It is said that one day Abu Saleh saw an apple floating down a stream and pulled it out of the water and ate it. Then, he felt remorse in his heart for having eaten the apple without the owner's permission. So, Abu Saleh started walking upstream along the river until he came to an apple orchard and saw the owner working in the field. He approached him and confessed to his eating of the apple and expressed his desire to pay for it. The owner was impressed by the honesty of the traveller and told him that the only compensation that will be acceptable to him would be for the traveller to marry his daughter who was blind, deaf, and handicapped. Abu Saleh agreed to this arrangement. However, during the wedding night, Abu Saleh was surprised to see that his bride was completely healthy in every respect. He went out of the room looking for the bride's father to inform him that a mistake had been made. The father of the bride explained to him that there was no mistake. He had called her daughter blind because she had not seen any indecent sight in her life; he had called her deaf since she had not heard any foul word in her life; and he had called her handicapped since she had never stepped outside the limits of the religious Law.

●

When he was in his late teens, Abdul Qadir decided to travel to Baghdad with a caravan to seek education in *Hadith*, *Tafsir* and *Fiqh*. On the way, the caravan was attacked by thieves and all the belongings of the travellers were seized. A robber asked Abdul Qadir if he had anything of

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<sup>126</sup> Jilan is a village in Bastam District of Senman Province of north-eastern Iran. It lies close to the south-eastern tip of the Caspian Sea.

value. To this Abdul Qadir replied that he had forty dinars. The robber searched his belongings but did not find anything of value. However, the robber took the boy to their leader and told him the boy's story. The leader of the robbers asked Abdul Qadir, "Boy, do you lie?"

The boy replied, "No, I am not lying. Before I left with the caravan, the dinars were sewn by my mother on the inside of my shirt."

Then one of the thieves searched his clothes and found the money. The leader was surprised and said, "Boy, you could have saved the money by simply lying to us."

Abdul Qadir replied, "Before I set upon my journey, my mother told me to always tell the truth even if my life depended on it as Allah frowns upon those who do not speak the truth."

After listening to this unexpected answer, the leader of the thieves began to weep and returned the entire loot to the owners. It is reported that all the thieves repented from their misdeeds and swore to act righteously upon the hands of the young Abdul Qadir. It is interesting to note that during his life time, great scholars of Islam and hundreds of thousands of devoted Muslims swore the oath of allegiance upon the hands of Abdul Qadir Jilani. However, the very first persons to do it were a band of some sixty thieves!



Abdul Qadir Jilani was a pupil of Shaikh Abul-Khair Hammad (d. 1131) and received much of his basic training from him. It is reported that one day when Abdul Qadir left the company of the Shaikh, the latter remarked to his other pupils, "This non-Arab has a foot that will be raised, when the proper time comes, and placed upon the necks of the saints of the time. And the necks of all the saints of his age will surely be bent at his disposal."



After completing his formal training in Baghdad, Abdul Qadir took to a life of wandering and solitary retreats, spending some twenty-five years in the desert regions of Iraq. Much of his spiritual advancement and mystic insights were gained during this period of his life. He was nearly fifty years old when he finally returned to Baghdad and began preaching

and teaching in a *madrassah* there. He has penned many books and is highly respected for his spiritual exploits and words of wisdom.

●

While at Baghdad, he attracted the following of so many of the residents that the existing scholars of the city became envious of his success and decided to send him a subtle message to leave the city and move on to some other place. Through a messenger, they sent him a vessel that was filled to the brim. While the disciples were puzzled by this strange gift, the saint understood that they were telling him that Baghdad was already full of scholars and had no room for another one. Displaying his own wisdom, the saint took a rose and, floating it upon the surface of the water, returned the vessel back to the scholars (implying that there is always room at the top!). Since that incident, Abdul Qadir Jilani earned the epithet: *The Rose of Baghdad*.

●

Being a non-Arab from Iran, Abdul Qadir Jilani was not fluent in Arabic, particularly its classical form. He narrates that once the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> appeared to him in a dream and asked him as to why he did not speak out. Abdul Qadir replied that being a non-Arab, he cannot speak fluently in the classical Arabic language. The Prophet asked him to open his mouth and placed his own saliva seven times in his mouth. Abdul Qadir Jilani narrates that from that time on he started speaking classical Arabic with great fluency. As well, his memory increased and he felt great spiritual change in himself.

●

Abdul Qadir Jilani was a straight-forward, fearless and honest individual who never hesitated in pointing out an injustice and putting it right. One time, the Caliph appointed a person as *Qadhi* (judge) who was an unjust man. Abdul Qadir immediately wrote to him:

“You have appointed the worst tyrant as judge over the believers. Let us see how you will answer yourself tomorrow when you are presented in front of the Great Judge—the Lord of the universe.”

On hearing this, the Caliph immediately rescinded his order and dismissed the judge.

●

Abdul Qadir Jilani offers the following description of his spiritual journey in one of his books, the *Malfuzat*:

“The heart of the son of Adam must continue to travel along the path of good and evil, honour and humiliation, wealth and poverty, until he finally acknowledges that all blessings are due to Allah. This means gratitude and patient endurance of misfortune. He must admit his sins and offenses until—having taken his last step on the good side and his last step on the bad side—there he is at the King’s door... He has seen the King’s door, and beyond it he can see things that no eye ever saw, that no ear ever heard of, and that never occurred to any human heart. The alternating sequence of good actions and bad actions is at an end; now comes the turn of conversation, discourse and sitting in company with the Lord.”

●

Having achieved his nearness to God, Abdul Qadir Jilani describes one aspect of its fruits as follows:

“There is a time when I do not eat until God is pleased to say: ‘Abdul Qadir, get up and eat for My sake, or wear these robes to please Me.’”<sup>127</sup>

●

When one of his sons asked him for his last advice while the latter was on his deathbed, Abdul Qadir Jilani said:

“Fear Allah and none other. Hope from Allah and entrust all your needs to Him. Hope and want nothing from anyone else. Rely on Allah and on none other. Unite with Him, unite with Him, unite with Him.”

●

More than seven centuries later, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> of Qadian, India, was awarded the title of “*Sultan Abdul Qadir*” in one of his revelations. Explaining this title he states that he, too, will be eminent among the saints of his time just as Abdul Qadir had his foot upon the necks of the saints of his time.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad, *Way of the Seekers*, Ch. 14

<sup>128</sup> Al-Hakam, Vol. XI, No. 11, March 31, 1907, p. 2



In his own book *Barakatud Dua* (The Blessings of Prayer), written in 1893, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> pays great tribute to Abdul Qadir Jilani by quoting a passage of his on the subject of achieving nearness to God. Following is the text of the actual quote from Abdul Qadir Jilani:

“If you desire to become an accepted one of God, then believe with utmost certainty and understand that your hands, your feet, your tongue, your eyes, and your whole being, and all its organs, are like idols in your way, and all other creation is similarly an idol barring your path. Your children, your wife, the worldly objectives you wish to achieve, worldly riches, worldly honour and prestige, every worldly hope and fear, your reliance or trust in anyone or anything, your fear of being harmed by anyone, all these are idols in your way. So do not become subservient to any of these idols, and do not lose your way in pursuit of them. That is, have recourse to them within the bounds of the *Shari‘ah* and the way of the righteous. If you succeed in this, you will become precious and your status will be raised beyond people’s imagination, and God shall make you heir to His prophets and messengers, which means that all their knowledge, wisdom and blessings, which had departed into obscurity and oblivion, will be granted afresh to you, and you will reach the highest level of sainthood.... Your prayers, your fortified resolve, and your blessing will relieve people of their anguish... the Hand of Providence shall be with you, whichever direction it takes you will be guided in the same way. The Eternal Voice will beckon you to itself... your attention and prayer will exercise control in the world... extraordinary and miraculous things will take place at your hand. Divine secrets shall be revealed to you and you shall be given understanding of subtle and profound matters of Divine knowledge, of which you are considered to be worthy and deserving.”<sup>129</sup>



Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> pays the following tribute to Abdul Qadir Jilani:

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<sup>129</sup> Abdul Qadir Jilani, *Futuhul Ghayb*, as quoted by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in his own book *Barakatud Dua* (1893) [*Roohani Khazain*, p. 15]

“Some natures have a spiritual affinity with others. In this way, my soul has an affinity with the soul of Syed Abdul Qadir Jilani and I have been made aware of it through clear spiritual visions...”<sup>130</sup>



Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> pays the ultimate compliment to Abdul Qadir Jilani in the following words:

“Once I saw in a vision that Syed Abdul Qadir Jilani has come and after bathing me with warm water, clothed me with a new dress. And standing near the circular room, said, ‘Come, we stand together and measure our height.’ Then he stood on my right, shoulder to shoulder, and we were equal.”<sup>131</sup>



Hadhrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad (1889-1965) wrote his own book *Minhajut Talibin*, the Way of the Seekers, based on a vision in which he saw himself holding a book of Abdul Qadir Jilani with that title.



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<sup>130</sup> Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Zameema Braheen-e Ahmadiyya*, part V, p. 65 footnote.

<sup>131</sup> Al-Hakam, Vol. 37, No. 33, September 14, 1934.

## **Fariduddin Attar (1145-1221 C.E.)**

Abu Hamid bin Abu Bakr, popularly known by his pen name—Fariduddin—and the moniker “Attar” (meaning perfumer), was a Persian from Nishapur<sup>132</sup> renowned for his mysticism, poetry and mastery of narrative.

Fariduddin Attar has painstakingly captured the accounts of the earlier saints in his famous book, *Tadhkiratul Auliya* (the Memorial of the Saints). It is an excellent collection of the life sketches and inspiring incidents in the lives of many mystics and saints whose biographies, up to that point in time, were lacking. Most other writings of Attar are poetic compositions including his well-known allegorical poem, *Mantiquit-Tair* (Conference of the Birds). However, while Attar has written so much about others, very little is known of his own life. He is known to have travelled widely to gain knowledge directly from the masters themselves and ran a pharmacy in Nishapur.

Attar was killed in the massacre inflicted in Nishapur in 1221 by the Mongols.



While Attar was clearly influenced by the writings of the mystics before him, he himself was a great inspiration for the greatest Persian mystical poet, Jalaluddin Rumi, who accords him great esteem in his own poetry. Alluding to the seven valleys of love in Attar’s *Conference of the Birds*, Rumi states, “Attar has roamed through seven cities of love, while we have barely turned down the first street.”



It is narrated that for Fariduddin Attar, the stimulus to adopt the life of a dervish came one day from the visit of a beggar to his shop. The way the beggar marvelled at the opulence of the shop made Fariduddin uneasy and he asked him to leave immediately. At this, the beggar responded, “I have

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<sup>132</sup> Nishapur is a city in the Khorasan Province of north-eastern Iran and was founded by the Sassanid king, Shapur (215-270 C.E.), in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E.



no difficulty in leaving as I am in my ragged cloak. But you, with all your opulence, how are *you* planning to leave?"

The fakir's responses affected Fariduddin greatly and he decided to give up his shop and joined a circle of dervishes.

●

Attar used to say:

"A true saint is occupied neither with this world nor with the next. He is not concerned with anyone but his Lord. Because he has died altogether to himself, he is completely absorbed in the achieving of union with God."

●

The following inspiring accounts have been taken from Attar's book, *Tadhkiratul Auliya* (the Memorial of the Saints):

Once Jesus was passing through the streets when some Israelites used abusive language against him. Jesus, however, responded by praying for them in return. Someone asked him if he was not enraged against them. To this Jesus answered, "I can only spend of what I have in my purse."

●

Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922) was a ninth century Muslim mystic who was known for his intense love of God and radical pronouncements. In one of his poems he states:

"I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I—  
We are two spirits dwelling in one body.  
If thou seest me thou seest Him,  
And if thou seest Him thou seest us both."

One day, based on a revelation of his, Mansur al-Hallaj exclaimed: *Ana al-Haqq* (I am the Truth). Considered a blasphemy by the jurists of the time, he was ordered to renounce it. He refused. On the order of the Caliph Muqtadir, Mansur Hallaj was ordered to be executed. During his trial, a judge asked him, "What is love?"

Hallaj replied, "You will see it today; you will see it tomorrow; and you will see it the day after tomorrow."

Attar writes that they killed him that day, burned him the next day, and threw his ashes to the wind the day after that.



The parting words of Al-Hallaj to the people were:

“Kill me O my faithful friends  
For to kill me is to make me live;  
My life is my death, and my death is my life.”



Once a certain saint prayed to God to know why He had let Hallaj to be executed. A voice replied, “We told him something in secret, but he let the secret out!”



Hallaj used to say: “God is jealous, and one sign of His jealousy is that He does not clear any way through to Himself other than Himself.”



Once a very pious saint passed away who was well known for his fear of God and for leading a perfectly sinless life. After his death, someone saw him in his dream and asked him as to how was he treated by the *Questioning Angels*. He replied that they were very angry with him. They said, “Didn’t you believe in the mercy and forgiveness of God?”



It is narrated from Yahya bin Mu‘az (d. 872 C.E.) who said, “It is better to have love of God, even if only as much as a grain of mustard seed, than seventy years of devotion and obedience without love.”<sup>133</sup>



The following story is narrated about Abdullah Hanif, a Sufi mystic. Among the many disciples of Abdullah Hanif were two students with the same name of ‘Ahmad’. The other disciples noticed that the saint always favoured one Ahmad over the other.

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<sup>133</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (translated by Henry Augustus Homes)

One day they asked him as to why he did so. To explain his reasons, he asked one Ahmad to take the camel that was tied outside to the top of the building's roof. To this the student immediately replied that it was impossible to do since the ladder could hardly take the weight of a single man.

The saint then gave the other Ahmad the same directive. Hearing this, the student immediately stood up and set about getting the camel to the top of the roof. Needless to say, he never succeeded.

The saint then explained to his disciples, "The second Ahmad whom I favour, never wasted any time in discussing the possibility or impossibility of my directive. He immediately set about doing it. But the first Ahmad found excuses. In the Court of God, it is obedience that counts and not worship or meditation or argument."

●

It is narrated about Abu Bakr Shibli (861-946 C.E.), the well known Sufi mystic of Persian descent, that one day he took a burning torch in his hand and ran towards the Ka'ba, saying, "I would like to burn this building of Ka'ba so that the people would move their attention to the God of Ka'ba."

●

At another time Abu Bakr Shibli remarked that he would like to burn down the hell and heaven so that people could perform their worships without any fear or greed!

●

Abu Bakr Shibli used to say:

"There are those among the people who desire this world; and there are those among the people who desire the world to come. But where is he who desires God?"

●

There was a time when there were only souls and no bodies. The souls were all arrayed in lines. The future world was presented to their sight. Nine out of ten souls ran towards it. Then paradise was presented to the remaining souls. Nine out of ten souls ran towards it. Then hell was shown to the remaining souls. Nine out of ten of these ran away from it. Then

only a few souls were left that were not being affected by whatever they saw. A Celestial Voice spoke to these remaining souls: "Foolish souls! What is it that you want?"

The souls answered, "Thou, Who knowest all, knowest what it is. It is Thee Whom we desire."

The Voice said to them, "Desire of Us is perilous; it causes hardships, and innumerable risks."

The souls replied, "We will gladly suffer anything to be with Thee, and gladly lose everything to gain Thee."<sup>134</sup>



Muhammad ibn Wasi', an eighth century Sufi saint from Baghdad, used to say: "I have met men such that one of them could be standing in a row in Prayer and there would be tears flowing down his cheeks without those beside him being aware of it. And I have met men such that one of them could have his head next to his wife's head on the pillow and the pillow under his cheek would be soaked from his tears without his wife being aware of it."



Someone asked Muhammad ibn Wasi' for advice. He said, "I advise you to be a king in this world and in the Hereafter." The questioner asked, "How can I do that?" Ibn Wasi' responded, "Renounce this world."



Someone asked Muhammad Ibn Wasi' about Judgment and Predestination. The saint replied, "God will not ask his servants on the Day of Resurrection about Judgment and Predestination. He will ask them only about what they had done."



Following is one of Attar's Persian poems on love:

"Intoxicated by the wine of Love,  
From each a mystic silence Love demands.  
What do all seek so earnestly? 'Tis Love.

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<sup>134</sup> Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*, Jonathan Cape Penguin Arkana, London, 1968

What do they whisper to each other? Love.  
Love is the subject of their inmost thoughts.  
In Love no longer “thou” and “I” exist,  
For Self has passed away in the Beloved.  
Now will I draw aside the veil from Love,  
And in the temple of mine inmost soul,  
Behold the Friend; Incomparable Love.  
He who would know the secret of both worlds,  
Will find the secret of them both, in Love.”<sup>135</sup>

●

Here is an allegorical poem by Attar likening the confinement of this worldly life to that of a coffin:

“In the dead of night a Sufi launched his tears.  
He said, “This world is like a coffin—closed—in which  
We are shut and in which, through our ignorance,  
We spend our lives in folly and stark ignorance.  
When death arrives and opens thus our coffins’ lids,  
Each one with wings flies off to yon eternity,  
But those, sans wings, stay locked inside the tomb.  
So you, my friends, before this coffin’s lid ‘s unlocked,  
Do all you can to be a bird upon God’s Way;  
Do all you can to build your wings and grow your plume.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Translated from the Persian by Margaret Smith in *The Jawahar Al-Dhat*.

<sup>136</sup> Translated from the Persian by Andrew Harvey and Eryk Hanut (after some modification by the present writer). Taken from *Perfume of the Desert*.

## **Mu‘inuddin Chishti (1142-1236 C.E.)**

Born at Herat in the Sistan Province of southern Afghanistan, Mu‘inuddin Chishti grew up in Iran and later migrated to India where he spent most of his adult life in Ajmer and is buried there. Known popularly in the Indian subcontinent as *Gharib Nawaz* (benefactor of the poor), Mu‘inuddin Chishti established the Chishtia Order that included such spiritual masters as Bakhtiar Kaki, Fariduddin Ganjshakar (Baba Farid), Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusrow.

Naturally inclined towards spirituality from his early childhood, Mu‘inuddin travelled to the seminaries of Samarkand and Bukhara to acquire religious knowledge directly from the masters of the day.

It is said that in a dream he saw the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> who asked him to go to the land of India. After visiting several Indian cities, he finally settled down in Ajmer. Here, his extremely kind nature and peace-for-all philosophy earned him a great many followers and converts. He was known for his extreme generosity, tolerance and respect for other religions, independence from rulers and high officials, and renunciation of material goods. After his death, the good work initiated by Mu‘inuddin Chishti in India continued to be carried out by his two noted disciples Baba Farid and Nizamuddin Auliya.

●

One day Mu‘inuddin Chishti was travelling with a number of his companions while all were keeping voluntary fasts. As they passed by a piece of farmland, a poor Hindu farmer working in his field invited them over for something to eat. Mu‘inuddin Chishti beckoned his companions to follow him into the hut of the farmer. As the simple food was placed in front of them, the companions looked enquiringly towards their master. Mu‘inuddin Chishti asked all of them to partake of some food. After they had eaten and left the hut, the companions asked him, “Weren’t we all fasting?”

To this the Sufi master replied, “Yes, of course.”

The companions then asked, “Isn’t there some punishment for wilfully breaking our fast?”

The Sufi master replied, “Yes, there is. We will all have to keep sixty fasts as penance.”

“Then,” asked his companions, “why did we break our fast?”

To this, the Sufi master replied, “If we had declined to eat, he might have felt that we were too proud to partake of his simple bread. I simply did not want to break his heart.”



Mu‘inuddin Chishti always emphasised the humane aspect of religion and exhorted his disciples to develop generosity like the river, affection like the sun and hospitality like the earth. These traits should be exercised without restraint and discrimination towards all of God’s creatures. It was for such universal message of love, peace and kindness that earned Mu‘inuddin Chishti the epithet of *Ghareeb Nawaz* meaning the “benefactor of the poor”.



The infinite love and boundless charity that Mu‘inuddin Chishti advocated for fellow man is summed up in his well known saying: “The highest form of devotion is to redress the misery of those in distress, to fulfil the needs of the helpless, and to feed the hungry.”



Here are some of the noteworthy quotes of Mu‘inuddin Chishti:

“Those who are true lovers of God give away both of the worlds for the sake of their Beloved and even then they feel that they have not done anything worthy.”



“The noise of the lover is only while he has not seen his Beloved. Once he sees the Beloved, he becomes calm and quiet, just as the rivers are boisterous before they join the ocean, but when they do so, they are becalmed for ever.”



“There are four cardinal virtues in an enlightened individual: (i) to refrain from begging while being poor, (ii) to show the appearance of being well-fed while being hungry, (iii) to maintain a cheerful disposition while being sad, and (iv) to befriend the enemy.”



“The praying of lovers is a secret.  
It is known only by those who are always praying.  
The ignorant worshipper does not know  
That the soul of the lover is always in prayer!”



“The best way of evading the fire of hell lies in feeding the hungry, providing water to the thirsty, removing the wants of the needy and befriending the miserable.”



“The heart was essentially created for throbbing with the love of God.”



After the death of Mu‘inuddin Chishti, an organisation was established in India known as the Chishtia Order that was dedicated to the following of the particular Way (*tariqa*) established by their spiritual master. Many saints have emerged in India who give credit for their own spirituality to the teachings and examples set by Mu‘inuddin Chishti. One of these persons was a Pashtun mystic poet by the name of Abdul Rahman (1650-1715) who was a contemporary of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. Known popularly as Rahman Baba, he came from Peshawar and wrote in the Pashto language. Following are two of his mystical poems. The first one is in praise of God, while the second allegorical poem defends man’s audacity to seek the Almighty:

“In His adoration, the earth has bowed its head,  
In His worship, the firmament is bent over,  
Every tree, every shrub, stand ready to bow before Him,  
Every herb and every blade of grass are a tongue to say His praise.  
Every fish in the deep praises and blesses His name,  
Every bird, in the meadows and in the fields, magnifies Him.”

She said: “I marvel at a lover of such conceit  
To walk so proud among the garden’s flowers.”  
I answered: “Do not wonder at what You see;  
It is Yourself, in the mirror of man!”





## **Mohaiuddin ibn al-‘Arabi (1165-1240 C.E.)**

Born in Murcia<sup>137</sup>, Spain, Mohaiuddin ibn al-‘Arabi was an Andalusian mystic and philosopher of Moorish origin. He is most well known today for his then radical concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* or Unity of Existence. According to this concept, everything in the universe is somehow an expression of the existence of God Himself—that there is nothing in the universe that is in anyway outside of God. Though an interesting mystical philosophy, his concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* has been often misunderstood and denounced as mere pantheism.

Being a precocious child, he completed his basic education at an early age, studying at Seville—the cultural centre of Muslim Spain—and also privately from other scholars of the time. Motivated by several dreams and some incidents, he decided to give up worldly pursuits in favour of search of God. At the young age of sixteen, he went into solitary retreat which afforded him great spiritual insights.



Around the same time, he went and visited the great Muslim philosopher, Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), known to the West as Averroes. It turned out to be a strange meeting between two quite dissimilar personalities with Averroes being old, well-renowned and given to scientific thinking and ibn al-‘Arabi being very young but highly advanced in spirituality and converse with God. Averroes got a very uncomfortable feeling that whatever he was thinking in his heart, ibn al-‘Arabi was quite aware of it. Eighteen years later when ibn al-‘Arabi went to visit Averroes for the second time, people were taking his body out to the graveyard for burial. His body was placed on a beast of burden and his copious works were put on the other side as counterbalance. Seeing this, ibn al-‘Arabi remarked:

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<sup>137</sup> Located in the southeast side of the country, Murcia was founded by the Umaiyyad Amir of Cordoba, Abdur Rahman II in 825 C.E.

“Here the master, there his works—  
Would that I knew if his hopes were fulfilled!”



Around the year 1200 C.E., ibn al-‘Arabi moved permanently out of Andalusia towards the east. It was around this time that he found himself entering the *maqam al-qurb* or the Station of Proximity with God. According to him it was a very unusual and initially very unsettling experience. After leaving Andalusia, he travelled through Marrakesh, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Hebron, Medina, and Mecca. He remained in Mecca for three years and started writing his most famous book, *Futuhati Makiyya* (Meccan Victories). It was here that he got married and had his first child and it was here in Mecca that he experienced numerous spiritual visions.

Leaving Mecca, he travelled extensively for some twenty years in the Islamic lands and had the opportunity to meet several noted mystics and scholars of the time including Shahabuddin Suharwardi (1155-1191) and Bahauddin Walad (d. 1230)—the latter being the father of Jalaluddin Rumi. Then he settled down in Damascus where he spent the last seventeen years of his life, passing away in 1240 C.E.



Following is an allegorical poem of ibn al-‘Arabi that landed him in considerable trouble with the local *‘ulema* of the time. They accused him of spending his time in idle pursuit of feminine images, not realising that the entire symbolic poem is in fact about God:

“As the full moon appears from the night,  
So appears her face amid the tresses.  
From sorrow comes the perception of her:  
The eyes crying on the cheek—like black narcissus  
Shedding tears upon a rose.  
More beauties are silenced—her fair quality is overwhelming.  
Even to think of her, harms her subtlety—  
Thought is too coarse a thing to perceive her.  
Then how can she be seen by a clumsy organ like the eye?  
Her fleeting wonder eludes thought.

She is beyond the spectrum of sight.  
When description tried to explain her, she overcame it.  
Whenever such an attempt is made, description is put to flight;  
Because it tries to circumscribe her.  
If someone seeking her lowers his aspirations—  
To feel in terms of ordinary love—  
There are always others who will not do so.”<sup>138</sup>

●

In the poem below, ibn al-‘Arabi makes the point that no religion is more sublime than the religion of love—love that is indiscriminate and all-encompassing:

“My heart has become capable of every form:  
It is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks;  
And a temple for idols, and the pilgrims’ Ka‘ba,  
And the tablets of Torah, and the book of Qur’an.  
I follow the religion of love, whichever way it takes me;  
My religion and my faith is the true creed.”<sup>139</sup>

●

Following is a prayer of ibn al-‘Arabi for obtaining nearness of God:

“O my God! Gift me with a heart by which I may be devoted to Thee in utter poverty, led by yearning and driven by desire, a heart whose provision is fear of Thee and whose companion is restlessness, whose aim is Thy nearness and acceptance. In Thy nearness lies the consummation of those who aim, and the fulfilment of the desire of those who seek.”

●

The following are some more examples of ibn al-‘Arabi’s philosophy expressed in poems:

“When my Beloved appears,  
With what eye do I see Him?

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<sup>138</sup> Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*, Jonathan Cape Penguin Arkana, London, 1968

<sup>139</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A., *The Mystics of Islam*, Arkana, 1989

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

With His eye—not with mine;  
For none sees Him except Himself.”<sup>140</sup>

“The eye perceives nothing but Him;  
Only He is to be known.  
We are His; by Him we exist; and by Him we are governed;  
And we are, at times, in His presence.”

“Neither My heaven nor my earth contains Me,  
But the heart of My faithful believer contains Me.”



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<sup>140</sup> Translated by Nicholson, Reynold A., in *The Mystics of Islam*.

## **Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273 C.E.)**

Born in Balkh<sup>141</sup> in northern Afghanistan, Jalaluddin is popularly known among the Muslims as Maulana, meaning “our lord”. The epithet “Rumi” (meaning Roman) comes from his long stay in Konya, Turkey, which was once ruled by the Eastern Roman Empire. With his Persian heritage, he has produced what is popularly believed to be the crowning glory of Persian literature in the field of poetry. He is treated as a venerable saint, a Sufi mystic, and an outspoken poet. His masterwork Persian poems under the title of *Mathnawi* stand only second to the Qur’an itself among the Persian speaking people. Of all the Persian poets, Rumi is the most widely translated and read in the Western world.

●

Rumi’s father, Bahauddin Walad (d. 1230), was himself a well recognised mystic of his time and was considered Sultan of the Scholars by his disciples. His book, *Ma‘arif*, is an excellent record of mystical experiences written in Persian. When the Mongols started invading Central Asia around 1215-1220 C.E., Bahauddin Walad took his family out of Balkh and moved westward. It is said that during this migration, Rumi met the most famous mystic poet of the Persian language at the time by the name of Fariduddin Attar, the writer of *The Conference of the Birds*, *Memorial of the Saints*, and *Asrarnama*. It is said that Attar immediately recognised the spiritual genius of Rumi. As he saw the young lad following behind his illustrious father, Attar remarked, “Here comes a sea followed by an ocean.” Attar gave the young Rumi his book, *Asrarnama*, which is believed to have been the inspiration for Rumi’s own mystical writings later in life.

●

Bahauddin Walad settled his family in Karaman, a city in south central Turkey, and remained there for seven years. It is here that Jalaluddin Rumi

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<sup>141</sup> Known to the Greeks as Bactra, Balkh was an ancient city in what is now northern Afghanistan, located some 20 km from the present day city of Mazar-e Sharif.

obtained much of his religious education. Eventually, the family moved to Konya, some 100 kilometres to the north, in the Anatolian region of Turkey. Here Rumi established himself as a well known teacher and jurist.

Rumi travelled widely spending many years in Damascus. After returning to Konya, Rumi began a life of a learned scholar giving lectures on jurisprudence, religion and philosophy. At the same time, he began writing his poetic works.



The primary teaching of Rumi revolves around the intense love for the Beloved and pining and aching for a response from Him. The ultimate aim of the lover is to join with the Beloved and be completely one with Him. To convey this underlying theme, Rumi uses stories, fables and everyday life scenes. The *Mathnawi* is a poem in six volumes and consists of some 25,000 verses (50,000 lines). The true regard for the *Mathnawi* in the eyes of the Persians is aptly conveyed by a couplet of the fifteenth century Sufi poet, Jami (1414-1492), who writes in Persian:

*“Hast Qur’an dar zaban-e Pahlavi”*

(It is the Qur’an in the Persian language)



It is narrated that the love of God was present in Rumi’s mind even when he was a young child. Once when his playmates asked him to jump with them to a neighbouring terrace, Rumi is reported to have replied:

“My friends, jumping from terrace to terrace are acts easily performed by cats and dogs. If you feel inclined, let us jump up to the firmament, and visit the realm of God!”



One reason for Rumi’s great popularity was the fact that his message was meant for everyone, without regard for one’s creed, colour or race. Addressing the seekers of truth, Rumi writes:

Come, come, whoever you are.

Wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving.

It doesn’t matter.

Ours is not a caravan of despair.  
Come, even if you have broken your vow a hundred times.  
Come, yet again, come, come.

Such generosity of heart towards other religions was not the norm in his time and brought considerable criticism by the more dogmatic members in the society. Once a Muslim clergy by the name of Sadr al-Din Qunawi (1207-1274) criticised Rumi in public by saying, “You claim to be in agreement with the seventy-two religious sects<sup>142</sup>. But the Jews cannot agree with the Christians, and the Christians cannot agree with the Muslims. If they cannot agree with each other, how can you agree with them all?” To this Rumi answered, “Yes, you are right, I agree with you, too.”<sup>143</sup>



The following stories are taken from the works of Jalaluddin Rumi:

Making the argument that predestination and preordination do not annul power of choice and free will, Rumi quotes the story of a thief who pleaded to the judge that what he had done was simply decreed by God. The Judge calmly replied that what he was going to do next (pronounce the punishment) was also decreed by God!



Someone saw a madman weeping bitterly. He asked him, “Why do you cry?”

The madman answered, “I am trying to attract the pity of His heart.”

The other said, “Your words don’t make sense, for He has no physical heart.”

The madman replied, “It is you who are mistaken, for He is the owner of all the hearts in the world.”

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<sup>142</sup> Referring to the splintering of the Muslims into seventy-two sects.

<sup>143</sup> Reprinted with permission of the copyright holder: *Discourses of Rumi (Fihi ma Fihi)*, translated by A.J. Arberry; published by Omphaloskepsis, Ames, Iowa



Once an ant saw a pen inscribing on the paper. She was fascinated by this mysterious phenomenon. The other ant remarked: “It is the finger that is the artist; the pen is simply a tool and a token.” The third, somewhat wiser, ant remarked: “It is actually the work of the arm. It is by its strength that the slender finger sketched the design.” Then yet one more sagacious ant remarked: “Do not consider this the work of the body alone that becomes unconscious in sleep or death. It is in fact the spirit that causes the finger to move.” Little did the most sagacious ant know that even the spirit has no power of its own without the controlling command of God.<sup>144</sup>



This tale is narrated in the *Mathnawi* that once a Bedouin was sitting on the side of a road, weeping uncontrollably. When a passerby asked for the reason of his distress, the Bedouin said, “My faithful dog lying over there is dying. He has been my steady companion, a watchman, a fine trapper and alert to drive off the thieves.”

When the passerby asked as to why the dog was dying, the Bedouin replied, “Dire hunger. He has not eaten in three days.”

By this time the passerby noticed the basket of bread that the Bedouin was carrying. He asked the Bedouin as to why didn’t he give some bread to the dog.

The Bedouin remarked, “Ah! My love for the dog doesn’t extend that far. The bread costs money. The water from the eyes can be shed for free.”<sup>145</sup>



A seeker went to the door of the Beloved and knocked. A voice asked: “Who is there?” The seeker answered: “It is I.”

The voice said, “There is no room here for Me and thee,” and the door was shut.

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<sup>144</sup> Arberry, A.J., *More Tales from the Masnavi*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963

<sup>145</sup> Arberry, A.J., *More Tales from the Masnavi*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963 (minor edits have been made to the original text of Arberry).



After a year of meditation, the seeker returned to the door of the Beloved, and knocked; the voice asked: "Who is there?" The seeker said, "It is Thou."

The door was opened.



Man passes through three stages: First he worships anything: man, woman, money, children and stones.

Then, progressing a little further, he worships God.

Finally he does not say: 'I worship God' nor 'I do not worship God.'

He has passed from the first two stages into the last.



For the true seeker of God, the most painful feeling is being separated from Him. Yet, this ache of separation has its own peculiar charm and attraction for the seeker. Referring to this pain and aching, Rumi says:

"Sweeter than this poison I did not see any drink,

Lovelier than this illness I did not see any health.

Sorrow for His sake is a treasure in my heart."



The following lines taken from his works indicate the mystic philosophy of Rumi:

"Wherever there is a ruin,

There is hope for a treasure—

Why don't you then seek the treasure

Of God, in the wasted heart?"



"O Love! O pure deep Love! Be here, be now, be all;

Worlds dissolve into Thy stainless endless radiance;

Frail living leaves burn with Thee brighter than cold stars;

Make me Thy servant, Thy breath, Thy core."



"This loneliness is worth more than a thousand lives,

This freedom is worth more than all the lands on earth.

To be one with the Truth for just one moment,

Is worth more than the world and life together."

●  
“Your task is not to seek for love,  
But merely to seek and find  
All the barriers within your self  
That you have built against it.”

●  
The pen would smoothly write the things it knew  
But when it came to love it split in two.  
A donkey stuck in mud is logic’s fate—  
Love’s nature only love can demonstrate.<sup>146</sup>

●  
“I am not contained in earth or heaven or the empyrean<sup>147</sup> —  
Know this for certain, O noble one!  
I am contained in the true believer’s heart; how wonderful!  
If thou seekest Me, search in those hearts.”<sup>148</sup>

●  
“Joseph’s beauty was not seen by the eye of his brethren—  
The eye of Moses regarded the staff as wood—  
The eye of the head was in conflict with the eye of the heart:  
The eye of the heart prevailed.”<sup>149</sup>

●  
“The Sufi, like the hunter, chases game;  
He sees the tracks of the musk deer and follows them.  
For a while it is the tracks which are his clues,  
But later, ‘tis the musk itself that guides him on.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Jawid Mojaddedi (Translator), *Rumi—The Masnawi*.

<sup>147</sup> Empyrean is the highest part of heaven.

<sup>148</sup> Afzal Iqbal, *The Life and Work of Jalaluddin Rumi*, Oxford Press, Pakistan, 1999

<sup>149</sup> Afzal Iqbal, *The Life and Work of Jalaluddin Rumi*, Oxford Press, Pakistan, 1999

<sup>150</sup> Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *Travelling the Path of Love—Sayings of Sufi Masters*, Golden Sufi Centre, 1995



“What can I do, O Muslims? I do not know myself.  
I am no Christian, no Jew, no Magian<sup>151</sup>, no Musalman.  
Not of the East, not of the West. Not of the land, not of the sea.  
Not of the mine of Nature, not of the circling heavens,  
Not of earth, not of water, not of air, not of fire;  
Not of the throne, not of the ground, of existence, of being;  
Not of India, China, Bulgaria, Saqsin<sup>152</sup>;  
Not of the kingdom of the Iraqs, of Khorasan<sup>153</sup>;  
Not of this world or the next; of heaven or hell;  
Not of Adam, Eve, the gardens of Paradise or Eden;  
My place—placeless; my trace—traceless.  
Neither body nor soul: all is the life of my Beloved.”



“Cross and Christians, end to end, I examined.  
He was not on the Cross.  
I went to the Hindu temple, to the ancient pagoda.  
In none of them was there any sign.  
To the uplands of Herat I went, and to the Kandahar  
I looked. He was not on the heights or the lowlands.  
Resolutely, I went to the summit of the mountain of Kaaf<sup>154</sup>.

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<sup>151</sup> The word “Magians” was used by the Greeks to refer to the Zoroastrians. The Greeks considered the Magians or Zoroastrians to be able to foretell the future by reading the stars.

<sup>152</sup> Saqsin was a medieval city that flourished from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Volga River delta. It corresponds to the modern day city of Astrakhan in Russia lying on the northern shores of the Caspian Sea.

<sup>153</sup> Khorasan was a province of ancient Iran that covered modern-day areas of eastern Iran and parts of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

<sup>154</sup> The Kaaf mountain, known also as Koh-e Kaaf or Kafkoh, is a mythological mountain in the eyes of the Iranian people. Since the Sassanid rule never extended across the Caucasus Mountains of Central Asia, a mysterious opinion about this area developed among the Persians and many stories, such as the Arabian Nights, are related to this area.

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

There only was the dwelling of the (legendary) Anqa<sup>155</sup> bird.  
I went to the Ka‘ba of Mecca. He was not there.  
I asked about Him from Avicenna the philosopher;  
He was beyond the range of Avicenna.  
Then, I looked into my own heart—  
In that, His place, I saw Him.  
He was in no other place.”

●

“I died as a mineral and became a plant,  
I died as a plant and rose to be an animal,  
I died as an animal and then I was Man.  
Why should I fear death? When was I less by dying?  
Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar  
With angels blest; but even from angelhood  
I must pass on: all except God doth perish.  
When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,  
I shall become what no mind ever conceived.  
Oh, let me not exist! For non-existence  
Proclaims in organ tones: “To Him we shall return.”<sup>156</sup>

●

“Like the rose, I smile with my body and not with mouth alone;  
Because I am—I without “I”—with the King of the Worlds, alone.  
O, bearer of the torch, ravisher of my heart until early morn,  
Lead my soul to my heart, do not take my heart alone!  
Do not estrange my soul from my heart because of anger and envy,  
That one, do not leave here; and this one, do not invite alone!  
Send a royal message, prepare a general invitation,  
Until when, O King, this one with You and that one alone?  
If You, like yester night, do not come again and keep silent,  
We’ll cry out one hundred times, O soul, we do not lament alone!”

●

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<sup>155</sup> The mythological phoenix was identified with the Anqa (Persian: *simorgh*) among the people of Iran and the Middle East.

<sup>156</sup> Nicholson, Reynold A., *The Mystics of Islam*, Arkana, 1989

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

“Give me ecstasy, give me naked wonder, O my Creator!  
Give birth to the Beloved in me, and let this lover die;  
Let a thousand wrangling desires become one Love.”

●

Rumi sums up his concept of death and what lies beyond in one of his poems, as follows:

“On the day I die, when I am carried towards the grave,  
Don’t say: ‘He is gone! He is gone!’  
Death has nothing to do with going away—  
The sun sets and the moon sets, but they are not gone.  
Death is the coming together;  
The tomb looks like prison,  
But it’s really release into Union.  
The human seed goes down in the ground  
Like a bucket into the well where Joseph is;  
It grows and comes up full of some great beauty.  
Your mouth closes here and immediately  
It opens with a shout of joy in yonder there.”

●

The epitaph on Jalaluddin Rumi’s grave reads:

“When we are dead, seek not our tomb in the earth,  
But find it in the hearts of men.”

●

## **Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325 C.E.)**

Born in Badayun in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, Nizamuddin Auliya was a well known Sufi saint belonging to the Chishti Order that believes in gaining God's nearness through renunciation of worldly things and service to humanity. His predecessors in the Chishti Order include: Mu'inuddin Chishti (1142-1236 C.E.), Bakhtiar Kaki (1173-1235 C.E.), and Fariduddin Ganj-Shakkar (1173-1266 or 1188-1280 C.E.). At the age of twenty, Nizamuddin went to Pakpatan (in present day Pakistan) and became a disciple of the Sufi saint Fariduddin Ganj-Shakkar, commonly known as Baba Farid. After completing his studies, he returned to Delhi where he set up a teaching seminary. He passed away in Delhi and is buried there.

Although Nizamuddin Auliya learned the Qur'an, Hadith and jurisprudence from well known scholars of his time, his heart was always in search of God. He often used to say, "In the days of youth, I used to live in the company of religious scholars, but in my heart I always thought that I should go away from their company and turn my face to the Divine Teacher."

Beside traditional Sufi beliefs, Nizamuddin Auliya emphasised extreme sympathy with mankind—particularly the poor and hapless in society; having complete trust in God; and boldly standing against all political aggression.

Nizamuddin Auliya also liked listening to *Qawwali*—a form of devotional singing—that was created especially for him by one of his disciples, Amir Khusrow.

While many a man spend their entire life trying to become a *lover of God*, Nizamuddin Auliya achieved his ultimate goal by becoming a *beloved of God*. His most endearing quality among the people was his true and sincere concern for the poor and the weak in society. He often found it difficult to eat, knowing that many people in Delhi had gone to bed without their evening meals.



Baba Farid, his spiritual master, once told Nizamuddin Auliya, “Be like a big tree, so that God’s creation may find rest and solace under your shadow.”



He was legendary for his hospitality, generosity and austerity. He ran a free kitchen at his house where food was served to any visitor without regard to his status or religious affiliation. He had simply one rule: “First greet, then eat, then talk.”



Nizamuddin Auliya maintained a healthy separation between the state and the religion. Once the Indian king, Sultan Alauddin Khilji (reign 1296-1316), wrote him a letter asking the saint for guidance. Nizamuddin Auliya never opened the letter, saying, “Dervishes have nothing to do with the state. If the Sultan does not like this, I will go and settle somewhere else. God’s earth is vast enough.” Alauddin Khilji offered him some villages which the saint refused. When the Sultan indicated his wish to meet him, he sent back a message saying, “If the Sultan enters by one door, I will make an exit through the other door.”



King Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq (reign 1320-1325), who took over from Sultan Alauddin Khilji, was very hostile towards Nizamuddin Auliya and ordered him to leave Delhi before he returned from his own expedition to Bengal. When his followers showed great consternation at this development, the saint remarked in Persian: “*Hunooz Dilli door ast*,” meaning that “Delhi is still far away”. It so happened that a wooden pavilion built for the King in his city collapsed, killing the King, who never returned to Delhi.



Nizamuddin Auliya was against seeking revenge: “If a man puts thorns in your way, and you also put thorns in his way, there will be thorns everywhere!”



With respect to the Sufi path, Nizamuddin Auliya taught that three things were necessary for a dervish to obtain. “They all begin with the

Arabic letter ع ('*ain*). These are: 'Ishq (love), 'Aql (intelligence), and 'Ilm (knowledge).”

●

When an old friend of his found the saint living in utter poverty, he was surprised since he believed that the saint, being a great scholar, would have a promising career. At this, the saint said a couplet, as follows:

“You are not my fellow traveller;  
Tread your own path;  
May you be affluent;  
And I, downtrodden.”

●

Once someone told a narrative about a certain saint who had expired while constantly repeating the name of Allah. Hearing this, the eyes of Nizamuddin Auliya filled up with tears and he began reciting the following quatrain:

“I come running to the end of Thy street;  
Tears are washing and washing my cheeks;  
Union with Thee—what else can I seek?  
My soul I surrender as Thy name I repeat.”

●

Following are some of the sayings of Nizamuddin Auliya:

“Allah holds dear those who love Him for the sake of human beings, and also those who love the human beings for the sake of Allah.”

●

“On the Day of Judgment, nothing will be subject to greater interrogation than one’s ability to provide solace to broken hearts. To hurt a human heart is to hurt the grace of Almighty God.”

●



## **Amir Khusrow (1253-1325 C.E.)**

Born in Patiala, northern India, of a Turkish father and an Indian mother, Amir Khusrow was truly a versatile genius. He was not only a Sufi mystic and a spiritual disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325), but also a recognised scholar, a notable poet and an accomplished musician. Through his writings and music, he became an iconic figure in the cultural landscape of Indian subcontinent. He is considered the father of *qawwali*, the devotional music of the Sufis that developed in India.

Being a classical poet of prolific output, he was brought to the royal courts of India where he served under seven rulers. He wrote both in Persian and Hindustani languages and his works remain part of the education curriculum in many universities today.



Following are some examples of his mystical poetry in Persian:

*“Kafir-e ishqam musalmani mara darkaar neest,  
Har rag-e man taar gashta hajat-e zunnar neest;  
Az sar-e baalin-e man barkhez ay nadaan tabeeb  
Dardmand-e ishq ra daroo bajuz deedar neest;  
Nakhuda dar kashti-e maa gar nabashad goo mabaash  
Maa khuda daraim maa ra nakhuda darkar neest;  
Khalq migoyad, ki Khusrow but-parasti mi kunad  
Aari! Ari! Mikunam! Ba khalq maa ra kaar neest.”*

“I am a pagan worshipper of love, the creed of Muslims I do not need;  
Every vein of mine is taut like a wire, the Hindu girdle I do not need;  
Leave from my bedside, you ignorant physician!  
The only cure for the patient of love is the sight of his Beloved—  
Other than this no medicine does he need.  
If there be no pilot on our ship, let there be none:  
We have God in our midst—the pilot we do not need.  
The people of the world say that Khusrow worships idols.  
Yes! Yes! I do indeed. We have nothing to do with people.”



*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

“Love came and spread like blood in my veins and skin,  
It filled me with the Friend and completely emptied me;  
The Friend has taken over all parts of my existence,  
Only my name remains, as all is He.”



Here is a couplet written in Hindavi<sup>157</sup>:

“Khusrow! The river of love flows backwards—  
He who floats, will drown; he who drowns, gets across.”



Here is a Hindavi poem written in praise of Nizamuddin Auliya, his spiritual master:

“You’ve taken away my looks, my identity, by just a glance—  
By making me drink the wine from the distillery of love.  
You’ve intoxicated me by just a glance.  
My fair, delicate wrists with green bangles in them,  
Have been held tightly by you with just a glance.  
I give my life to you, O my cloth-dyer,  
You’ve dyed me in yourself, by just a glance.  
I give my whole life to you, O Nizaam,  
You have made me your bride, by just a glance.”



Here is the translation of a poem that Amir Khusrow wrote in two languages with alternating lines of Persian and Hindavi:

“Do not overlook my misery  
Brandishing your eyes and weaving tales;  
My patience has brimmed over, O Sweetheart,

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<sup>157</sup> Also known as Hindi Urdu, Hindavi is the lingua franca of north India. It is derived essentially from the Khariboli dialect of Delhi and incorporates a large vocabulary from Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and Turkic languages. Formally, it has two separate forms: Standardised Hindi and Standardised Urdu. Colloquially, however, Hindi and Urdu can hardly be differentiated.

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

Why do you not take me to your bosom?

“The nights of separation are long like tresses,  
The day of our union is short like life;  
When I do not get to see my Beloved Friend,  
How am I to pass the dark nights?

“Suddenly, as if the heart, by two enchanting eyes  
Is beset by a thousand deceptions and robbed of tranquillity;  
But who cares enough to go and report  
To my Darling my state of affairs?

“The lamp is aflame; every atom excited,  
I roam, always, afire with love;  
Neither sleep to my eyes, nor peace for my body,  
Neither comes Himself, nor sends any messages.

“In honour of the day of union with the Beloved  
Who has lured me so long, O Khusrow;  
I shall keep my heart suppressed,  
If ever I get a chance to get to His place.”



## **Bahauddin Naqshband (1318-1389 C.E.)**

Coming from a Persian descent and born in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, Bahauddin Naqshband was perhaps the most important Muslim personage belonging to the fourteenth century of the Christian Era. He established the Naqshbandi Way (*tariqa*) that is now followed by many Muslims in numerous countries.

Bahauddin Naqshband was a very devoted lover of God and tended to follow the selfless way of Awais Qarani by whom he was greatly influenced. He had many wonderful spiritual experiences and paved the way for many later saints to follow.

The one thing that he emphasised most on the path of God was the getting rid of one's ego and the killing of one's self.

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Bahauddin was given to worship and meditation at an early age. While in his late teens, he would get up some three hours before the *Fajr* Prayer to perform his *Sunnah* Prayer. One day, his spiritual master heard him praying in his prostration:

“O my Lord! Give me the power to carry the difficulties and the pain of Your Love.”

Later, his spiritual master asked him to change his supplication and say instead: “O Allah, grant your pleasure to this weak servant.” The teacher told him that God doesn't like His servants to be in difficulties. Although God in His wisdom might give some difficulties to His servants to test them, the servant must not ask to be in difficulties. “This,” the teacher told him, “would not be respectful to your Lord.”

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At the death of his spiritual master, Bahauddin moved to another town and started studying under a new teacher. His previous teacher had written to his new teacher, “I will not be happy with you if you will not take good care of him.” Bahauddin narrates that one day he heard a voice coming from the heavens, “Is it not enough for you to leave everyone and to come to Our Presence alone?” Bahauddin trembled at hearing the voice and immediately performed his ablutions and said two *rak'as* in a way that he

had never prayed before. He narrates that, “I felt that I was praying in the Divine Presence. Everything was opened to my heart in a state of unveiling (*kashf*). The entire universe disappeared and I was not aware of anything other than praying in His Presence.”

●

In one of his spiritual experiences, Bahauddin was asked as to why he was embarking upon this path of spiritual pursuit. He answered, “In order that whatever I say and whatever I want will come to pass.” He was then intimated, “That cannot be. Whatever *We* say and whatever *We* want is what will happen.” To this Bahauddin responded that it was not acceptable to him, “I must be permitted to say and do whatever I like, or I don’t want this Way.” The voice responded with its previous position and Bahauddin maintained his position, stating it the third time.

Bahauddin narrates that he was left alone for a period of two weeks in which he was taken with extreme anxiety, remorse and depression. Then the voice was heard again, saying, “O Bahauddin, whatever you want, We will grant.” Bahauddin narrates that he was overjoyed and responded, “I want to be given a Path that will lead everyone who travels on it straight to the Divine Presence.” At this he was bestowed a great vision and heard the voice saying, “You are granted what you have asked.”

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Bahauddin narrates that one night he saw a certain dervish in his dream whom he had never met previously. He was told that his name is Khalil Ghirani. Then one day in Bukhara he saw a person who looked exactly like the dervish he had seen in his dream. When he asked his name he learned that it was Khalil Ghirani. When Bahauddin wanted to tell the dervish about his dream, the dervish remarked that there was no need as he knew it already. Khalil Ghirani was of Turkish origin and was highly revered among the people of Transoxiana. Bahauddin served the dervish for some six years and learned a great deal from him.

●

Once during his travels, Bahauddin met another lover of God and the two recognised each other because of their common pursuit. The stranger asked him as to how did Bahauddin treat his self. To this, he replied, “If I

find something I thank Allah, and if not, I remain patient.” The stranger said that this was easy and asked him to do more. Bahauddin was then ordered to help the needy, serve the weak and motivate the broken-hearted. This he did. Then he was ordered to maintain humbleness, humility and tolerance at all times. This he did, too. He was then ordered to take care of the animals, to cure their sickness, to clean their wounds and to help them find their provisions. He did this until it became his habit to stop in the street and give the animal the right of way. Bahauddin narrates that because of all this, he felt great happiness in his heart and ultimately saw a vision in which he felt as being part of every human being and every creature on this earth.

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One day Bahauddin had an unusual spiritual experience. While he was wearing the cloak of his spiritual master, he felt that he was being sanctified with great heavenly blessings. He trembled during this experience and felt himself entering a state of true annihilation of the self where nothing existed except the presence of the Lord. Then he saw himself reflected in the mirror of the Messenger of Allah, in the image of a star in an ocean of light without beginning or end. Then certain secrets of the essence of the name ‘Allah’ were opened unto him and he felt as if his heart had stopped beating and that he had entered a state of death. Then he felt his soul slowly re-enter his body and the vision ended.

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Bahauddin states that the real key on the path of seeking God is denying one’s existence and neglecting and disregarding one’s ego. This key allowed Bahauddin to enter into many spiritual experiences and made him a part of all creation. Bahauddin states: “This developed in me a certainty that everyone was better than me; that everyone provided a benefit and that only I gave no benefit.”

Bahauddin narrates that one day he had a spiritual experience in which the Divine Voice said, “Ask whatever you like from Us.”

At this, Bahauddin replied in great humility, “O Allah, grant me one drop of Your ocean of mercy and blessings.”

The answer came, “You are asking from Our great generosity for only one drop?”

Bahauddin narrates that this answer was like a tremendous slap on his face whose sting lasted on his cheek for several days. Then one day Bahauddin prayed to God saying, “O Allah, grant me from Your ocean of mercy and blessing the power to partake of it.”

Bahauddin narrates that at that time he saw a vision in which he was sitting on a throne and that throne was over an ocean of mercy. Then a voice said, “This ocean of mercy is for you. Give it to My servants.”



Once Bahauddin was commenting on the Prophet’s Hadith: “Part of the faith is to remove what is harmful from the way.” Bahauddin explained that what the Prophet meant by ‘harmful’ was the ego and what he meant by ‘the way’ was the Way of God. Bahauddin explained that this is the same philosophy that was expressed by God when he said to Bayazid Bastami, “Leave your self and come to Us.”



When asked to show some miracles, he responded, “What more miracles do you want to see than that we are still walking on this earth with all these sins upon us?”



Commenting on a Hadith of the Prophet wherein God says that: “*Assaumu li*,” that ‘the fast is for Me,’ Bahauddin explained that it is an assertion that the true fast is to abstain from all that is other than God.



Once commenting on the Prophet’s Hadith, “*Assalatu mi’raj ul-mu’min*” (Prayer is the ascension of the believer), Bahauddin explained that it refers to that level in the Prayer when the worshipper ascends to the Divine Presence. In this state, the worshipper’s heart reaches a state of contemplation through his prayer and there are manifest in him awe and reverence and obedience and humility. Bahauddin further explained that when the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> would reach that state in his prayer, even the people around him could hear the coming from his chest a sound which resembled the humming of bees.



Bahauddin Naqshband greatly emphasised the fact that many things other than ordinary idols can be the cause of *shirk* or partnership with God.

Quoting Shaikh Arsalan, a twelfth century Sufi saint from Damascus, Bahauddin explained that undue consideration for the reward of Paradise and the fear of Hell also keeps people away from focusing on the Person of God.

He also quotes an incident concerning Abul Hasan Shadhili (1196-1258), the Morocco born Sufi saint who taught in several countries along North Africa. Once the spiritual master of Shadhili asked him: “O my son, with what are you going to meet your Lord?” Shadhili replied, “I am coming to Him with my poverty.” At this, the master admonished him, “O my son, do not ever repeat that again. This is the biggest idol, because you are still coming to Him with something. Free yourself of everything and then come to Him. Although it is an obligation to do good deeds, yet the heart must not be attached to them. They should only be done for His sake and for His love, without expectation of anything in return.”



Bahauddin frequently used to keep voluntary fasts. However, if a guest came, he would sit down with him, break his fast and eat. According to him, the Companions of the Prophet used to do the same. He said that one of the principles of worship is to keep it hidden. If one reveals it, for example by saying to the guest, “I am fasting,” then pride may enter in the mind and may ruin the fast.”





## **Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1561-1624 C.E.)**

A contemporary of the Mughal Emperors Akbar (1542-1605) and Jahangir (1569-1627), Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi was born near Patiala, in east Punjab, India. He was responsible for the revival and rejuvenation of the religion of Islam in the eleventh century of Hijra. Known popularly as *Mujaddid Alif Thani*, meaning the Reformer of the Second Millennium, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi undertook the restoration of Islam in India that had been corrupted under the influence of the Emperor Akbar. He also ran afoul of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Many scholars of the time who were envious of the Shaikh instigated Emperor Jahangir against him who imprisoned him in 1619 for three years.

The most well-known works of Ahmad Sirhindi are a collection of his letters written to various persons and compiled under the title of *Maktubat*.

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi strongly denounced Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of existence) and replaced it with his modified concept of *Wahdat al-Shahood* (unity of witnessing).

●

One of the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> reads: “There will be among my nation a man called “*silah*” (connection). By his intercession many people will be saved.”

Referring to the above Hadith, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi writes: “God has made me the “*silah*” between the two oceans (meaning oceans of external and internal knowledge).

●

Shaikh Mir Husamuddin said, “I saw the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> in one of my dreams standing on the pulpit and praising Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. The Prophet was saying, ‘I am proud and happy with his presence among my *Ummah*. God has made him Reviver of the religion.’”

●

It is said that many other saints had also predicted his advent. Shaikh Ahmad Al-Jami<sup>158</sup> (1048-1141), the Persian Sufi mystic said, “After me will appear seventeen men of God, all of whom are named Ahmad and the last one among them will be at the head of the millennium. He is going to be the highest of them and he is going to receive the state of unveiling. He is going to revive this religion.”

●

Similarly, Khwaja Al-Amkanaki of Bukhara (d. 1599) said to Muhammad Al-Baqi, his disciple: “A man from India is going to appear. He will be the Imam of his century. He will be trained by you, so hurry to meet him, because the people of God are awaiting his arrival.”

Muhammad Al-Baqi narrates: “That is why I moved from Bukhara to India.” After meeting the Shaikh, Muhammad Al-Baqi told him, “You are the one whose appearance Khwaja Al-Amkanaki predicted. When I saw you I knew you were the *Qutb*<sup>159</sup> of your time. When I entered the region of Sirhind in India, I found a lamp which was so big and so bright that its light reached up to the heavens. Everyone took from that lamp’s light. You are that lamp.”

●

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi used to say, “Allah said, ‘I have given you special gift and perfections which no one will receive other than you until the time of the Mahdi.’”

●

One contemporary saint of his wrote to Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, “The states of spirituality that you reached and you speak of, did the Companions also receive them?” The Shaikh replied, “I cannot answer your question unless you come and pay me a visit.” When the saint came, he immediately became aware of the spiritual reality of the Shaikh and

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<sup>158</sup> It was the great influence of Shaikh Ahmad Al-Jami (1048-1141) that the well known Persian Sufi poet, Nuruddin Abdur Rahman Jami (1414-1492), picked his own pen name.

<sup>159</sup> *Qutb* (literally meaning the “pole”) is a title of great honour used for those at the highest level of sainthood.

saw the darkness of his own heart vanish. At this he exclaimed, “I see now that these spiritual states were revealed to the Companions simply by looking at the Messenger of Allah.”



In one of his *Maktubat*, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi writes:

“It must be known that Allah has placed us under His obligations and His prohibitions. Allah says, ‘...*Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain from that...*’<sup>160</sup> If we are going to be sincere in this, we have to attain annihilation (of the self) and love of the Essence. Without these we cannot reach this degree of obedience.



Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi describes various stages involved in the journey leading to the unveiling of the Divine Realities:

“Moving to Allah is a vertical movement from the lower stations to the higher stations, until the movement surpasses time and space and dissolves into annihilation (*fana*).

Moving in Allah is the stage in which the seeker moves from the station of Names and Attributes to a state which neither words nor signs can describe. This is the state of existence in Allah (*baqa*).

“Moving from Allah, the seeker returns from the heavenly world to the world of cause and effect, descending from the highest station to the lowest. This is known as the state of the Farthest and the Nearest.

“Moving in the world of creation, the seeker achieves Guidance following in the footsteps of the Prophet.

“The entire process is like threading a needle. The thread seeks the eye of the needle, passes through and then proceeds down to where it began. There the

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<sup>160</sup> Surah *Al-Hashar*, 59:8.

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

two ends meet, form a knot and secure the entire thread. Thus, the thread and any material that the needle catches, is sewn into the fabric of Unity.”



The Shaikh writes: It is mentioned in a Hadith of the Prophet, ‘Scholars are the inheritors of the prophets.’

Describing this, the Shaikh writes: “The knowledge of the prophets is of two kinds: knowledge of laws and knowledge of the secrets. Thus the real inheritors are those who take the knowledge of the laws as well as the knowledge of the secrets. Only the saints have truly received and protected this inheritance.”



## **Shah Waliullah (1703-1762 C.E.)**

Known popularly as *Muhaddith* Dehlvi, Shah Waliullah is widely considered by the Muslims to be the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the twelfth century of Islam. Being a scholar and philosopher of Islamic sciences, he devoted all his efforts in purifying the religious practices in India. He also advocated many progressive ideas including social reforms and equal rights of individuals in society. He also removed many innovations and encrustations that had crept into the faith and presented it in its original pure and pristine condition.

Having studied extensively under scholars and masters of the day in India and Arabia, Shah Waliullah produced a number of his own writings in Persian and Arabic languages. He was extremely saddened by the poor spiritual condition of the Muslims in India and tried his best to improve their character and morale. Having been born four years prior to the death of the last powerful Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, much of the life of Shah Waliullah coincided with the weakening of the Mughal rule in India and the declining political influence of the Muslims within the country.

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It is said that during his stay in Mecca (1730-1732), he had a dream in which the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> commanded him to work for the betterment and emancipation of the Muslim community in the subcontinent. Therefore, on his return to New Delhi in 1732, he earnestly undertook this obligation. Putting aside any temptation of personal glory, he set about educating the people and showing to them the true spirit of Islam.

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Shah Waliullah did not limit his efforts to purely scholarly endeavours. He recognised the intimate relationship between the spiritual condition of the Muslim masses and their economic poverty and political decline. Thus, he wrote several letters to leading political figures of the time including Ahmad Shah Abdali (1722-1773), Nizamul Mulk Asaf Jah (1671-1748), and Najibud-Daula (1732-1775), to stop the political rot that was setting in.

He was the first person to translate the Qur'an into a popular language, Persian in this case. His son, Shah Abdul Aziz (1745-1823) was the first person to translate the Qur'an into Urdu. Until then, translating of the Holy Book was frowned upon by Muslim clergy.

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By the time of Shah Waliullah, Sufi practices were losing their allure among the Muslims and many believed that the Sufis trod a path outside the bounds of the Islamic Law, the *Shari'a*. Shah Waliullah, through his numerous writings, bridged this gap between traditional Sufi doctrines and then current perceptions in India and, once again, made the Sufi path honourable among the masses.

●

Removal of innovations and corrupt practices in Islam was one of his major goals. Thus he denounced extravagance in marriages, exploitation of the poor and indulgence in a life of luxury. Going against the grain of then social norms, Shah Waliullah favoured the remarriages of widows and distribution of wealth along socialistic principles. Addressing the nobility of his time, he writes:

“O Amirs! Do you not fear God? How is it that you have completely thrown yourselves into the pursuit of momentary pleasures and have neglected those people who have been committed to your care! As a result, the strong are devouring the weak... All your mental faculties are directed towards providing yourself with sumptuous food and soft-skinned women for enjoyment and pleasure. You do not turn your attention to anything except good clothes and magnificent palaces.”

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## **Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> (1835-1908 C.E.)**

Born in the small hamlet of Qadian in north-western India in 1835, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was descended from a line of Mughal ancestors that had migrated from Samarkand in the seventeenth century. Reclusive by nature and a booklover by habit, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was hardly interested in the usual activities of young boys and spent most of his time in the local mosque. Thus, at a relatively early age, he gained a good mastery of the eastern languages, the Qur'an and Hadith literature and the writings of medieval Muslim saints and scholars.

He was around thirty years old when he came to be blessed by a steady stream of true dreams, revelations and visions—a process that continued right up to his death in 1908.

He was extremely saddened by the poor spiritual condition of the Muslims in the world and the severe attacks under which Islam and the character of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> suffered in the land of India. It was around 1882 that he seriously took up his pen in defence of Islam. Over the next twenty-six years, he penned some eighty books in Urdu, Arabic and Persian, and published hundreds of posters.

He claimed that he was intimated by God in his revelations to be the Reformer of the fourteenth century of Islam and the personification of the second coming of Jesus son of Mary. He asserted that Jesus Christ had passed away—much like all other prophets had passed away—and that his second coming could only take place in a metaphorical sense.

In 1889, he laid down the foundation of his own community that is known today as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at.

Both, the issue of Jesus' death and his own claims, stirred up a great controversy in India and the adjoining Muslim lands leading to vituperative outpourings against him and outright discrimination against his followers. This treatment has continued until today.

In his life, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was extremely meek, humble, gentle, soft-spoken, honest and truthful. He carried a burning love for his master, the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>, and a much stronger yearning for his true Beloved—God Almighty.

His main mission in life was to restore the pristine elegance of Islam—that had been severely tarnished over the years—and demonstrate to the people that a very real relationship of love with God could indeed be forged in this very life. He was profusely blessed with true dreams, revelations and visions and made great many prophecies based on these. As long as he lived, he remained an unmatched champion of Islam—even in the eyes of his opponents.

The coming of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> at the head of the fourteenth century of Islam was like a spring breeze and drizzle that restored the greenery and fragrance of a once splendid and most perfumed garden that had fallen victim to the vagaries of time and had almost withered away and nearly dried up. The process of intensive and widespread Divine communication commenced once again, and the world entered the Latter Days of Islamic glory promised in the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>.



In the year 1868 or thereabouts, a Muslim clergy by the name of Maulwi Muhammad Husain settled himself in Batala after completing his religious education. He belonged to the Ahl al-Hadith denomination against which there was considerable opposition by the largely Hanafi followers of Muslim India. One day, a person who had some differences of opinion with Maulwi Muhammad Husain Batalwi, asked Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> to come and debate with him. To this he agreed. At the time of the debate, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> asked the opponent as to his assertions. When these were explained, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> exclaimed that he did not find anything objectionable in these viewpoints and declined to enter into a debate with him. All the listeners shouted that he had lost and the person who had asked him to come and participate in the debate said that he had been shamed and humiliated. It was that night that Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> received the now well known revelation in Urdu:

“Thy God is well pleased with thy action, and He will bless thee greatly, so much so that kings will seek blessings from thy garments.”



Then after this he was shown the very kings in a vision who were riding on horses.



In June 1876, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was visiting Lahore in connection with a court case when he dreamed that his father was about to pass away. Immediately, he travelled back to Qadian where he found his father ill but not seriously so. The next day, at noon, he received the following Qur'anic verse as revelation: "By the heaven and what comes by night."<sup>161</sup> With the revelation he was also given the intimation that it referred to the death of his father that evening and was given to understand that it was by way of condolence from God. That day, after sunset, his father passed away.



When he received the revelation and intimation of his father's death, he was naturally concerned as to what will happen to the source of income that was tied to the person of his father and what calamities he may end up facing. Then, immediately, he received another revelation of a Qur'anic verse: "Is not Allah sufficient for his servant?"<sup>162</sup>



Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was extremely truthful and never refrained from saying the right thing even if his own interest was at stake. One day in 1878, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> sent a manuscript to a printer by mail, at the rate prescribed for parcel post. In it he also enclosed a letter addressed to the printer with certain instructions. He was not aware that inclusion of letters was not allowed under postal regulations when postage was paid at the cheaper parcel rate. Out of spite, the owner of the printing press reported the incident to the postal authorities who promptly filed a case against him. When he was summoned to the court, his own lawyer advised that he should simply deny that he had enclosed the letter

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<sup>161</sup> Surah *Al-Tariq*, 86:2.

<sup>162</sup> Surah *Al-Zumar*, 39:37.

with the parcel. Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> immediately rejected this possibility even if it led to punishment. His lawyer then informed him that in that case there was no possibility of acquittal since he would be admitting to the breaking of postal regulations. Later in the court, he admitted to his action and explained that it was carried out without knowledge of the regulation and with no intention to defraud the Post Office. The court was so impressed by his forthrightness and honesty that the case against him was immediately dismissed.



Although Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> had started receiving revelations in the 1860s, his real mission and status had not yet been made apparent to him. It was in March 1882, when he was forty-seven years old, that his true station began to be revealed. Following is a translation of the Arabic revelation vouchsafed to him:

“God bless thee, O Ahmad... The Gracious God has taught thee Qur’an so that thou shouldst warn the people whose ancestors have not been warned... Proclaim! ‘I have been commissioned and I am the first of the believers...’

“He it is Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the true faith so that He should make it prevail over all faiths... We shall suffice thee against those who mock at thee... This is a mercy from thy Lord. He will perfect His bounty upon thee so that it should be a sign for the believers. You have appeared with clear vision from your Lord so give glad tidings to people... Tell them: ‘If you love God, then follow me, God will then love you...’

“God praises thee from His Throne. We praise thee and call down blessings on thee... I am with thee and be thou with Me wherever thou may be... God will exalt thy name and perfect His bounty upon thee in this world and the hereafter... Give glad tidings to those who have believed that they have the station of righteousness before thy Lord. Recite to them whatever has been revealed to thee from thy Lord.”

With this revelation of March 1882, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> realized that he was being appointed by God as the *Mujaddid* or Reformer

of the fourteenth century of Islam. At this stage he did not make any specific public claim; his status as the Promised Messiah was yet to be revealed to him in another eight years. However, he intensified his prayers and worship and devoted all his time towards his writings and preaching the truth and the excellence of Islam.



One day in 1885, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was retiring on a cot while a devoted follower of his, Abdullah Sannauri, was massaging his feet. Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> saw in a vision that he had written certain divine decrees setting out events in the future and then presented the paper to God Almighty for His signature. God appeared to be in the form of a ruler. He dipped his pen in an ink-well holding red ink and first flicked it in his direction and with the rest of the ink, put down His signature. The vision ended. As he opened his eyes, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad saw several red drops that had fallen on his clothes and a few that fell on the cap of the attendant. The attendant, in his own statement recorded later, stated that while he was massaging his feet, he noticed a red drop on his ankle. When he touched it with his own finger, it spread out like liquid. Then he noticed some more wet stains on the shirt of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>. At this, the attendant got up and carefully examined the entire chamber to determine the source of such droplets. He could find none. On his enquiry, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> narrated his vision. Abdullah Sannauri beseeched him to give the shirt to him. Initially, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> hesitated for fear that it may become an object of undue reverence, but then relented when Abdullah Sannauri promised that he will have the shirt interred with his coffin upon his own death.



Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> used to say the following prayer in Urdu very frequently. In a letter written to Hakim Nuruddin in 1885, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> drew his attention towards this prayer with great humility. It is a great prayer to be said at a difficult hour:

“O my Benefactor and O my God! I am an unworthy servant of Thine who is full of error and heedlessness. Thou hast seen transgression upon transgression from me and hast bestowed reward upon reward; Thou hast seen fault upon fault from me and granted favour upon favour. Thou hast always covered my blemishes and granted me innumerable blessings. So, even now, take mercy on this unworthy and sinful person, and forgive my audacity and ingratitude, and rid me of this sin, for there is none who can cure except Thee. Amen.”<sup>163</sup>

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In 1888, some six years after being appointed as a Reformer, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was commanded by God to start accepting the *Bai'at*—the oath of allegiance—from his followers. In an announcement printed on green paper and published on December 1, 1888, he said:

“I have been commanded that the seekers after truth should enter into covenant of *Bai'at* with me for the purpose of learning the way of true faith, true purity and the love of the Lord and of discarding an evil, slothful and disloyal life.

“Therefore, those who perceive such strength in themselves should come forward to me. I shall be the sharer of their sorrows and shall try to lighten their burdens. God will bless them through my prayers and my attention towards them provided they are wholeheartedly ready to comply with the conditions of the covenant which are divinely determined.”

With the taking of the *Bai'at* or the oath of allegiance, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> laid down the foundation of a movement which was to be made up of people completely devoted to the cause of Islam in every respect.

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It was in early 1890 that God revealed to him that Jesus Christ had passed away and that his second coming was to take place in a metaphorical sense. He announced to the world that the Prophet

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<sup>163</sup> From *Maktubat Ahmadiyya*, volume 5, number 2, page 3.

Muhammad's prophecy of the coming of the *Mahdi* and the return of Jesus Christ was fulfilled in his own person. He further asserted that God had appointed him to bring a reform in the world and re-establish the glory and supremacy of the religion of Islam.

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Pandit Lekh Ram, a leader of Arya Samaj<sup>164</sup>, was a bitter enemy of Islam and used extremely foul language with respect to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> repeatedly asked him to refrain from using such language but he would not desist. Finally, on February 20, 1893, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> received a revelation and made the following announcement on its basis:

“Within six years from today, this man will be overtaken by severe torment as a punishment for the disrespect which he has shown towards the Holy Prophet.

“Now, by announcing the prophecy, I am seeking to inform all Muslims, Christians and followers of other religions that if this person is not overtaken within the period of six years from today by a torment that should be distinguishable from ordinary sufferings and should bear an extraordinary character and should be in the nature of Divine punishment, then it might be concluded that I have not been sent from God.”

In another revelation, God informed him that this reckoning will take place on the day next to the day of the *Eid* festival. Pandit Lekh Ram met his fateful end on March 6, 1897, on the day following the festive day of *Eid ul Adha*. He was fatally stabbed by an unknown assailant who was never apprehended.

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<sup>164</sup> Arya Samaj was a reform movement within Hinduism that believed in the infallible authority of the Vedas. They prohibited idol worship, use of icons, animal sacrifice, belief in Avatars or incarnations of God, and the Hindu caste system. At the time of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the movement had taken on a militant form, particularly against Islam.

In August 1897, Dr. Henry Martyn Clark (1857-1916), a medical doctor stationed at the Church Mission Society (CMS) in Amritsar, brought a charge against Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> in the court of the District Magistrate. Dr. Clark accused Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> of instigating a young man by the name of Abdul Hamid to murder him.

It is interesting to note that while the enemies were levelling charges of murder against Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>, his own behaviour towards them was that of a gentleman. During the trial Maulwi Muhammad Husain of Batala, who was an enemy of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>, appeared as a witness against him. While Maulwi Muhammad Husain was in the witness box, the defence counsel retained by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> started to cross examine him. The defence counsel wanted to show the court that Maulwi Muhammad Husain did not enjoy a good reputation in private life. For this purpose the defence counsel asked him a question which would have elicited a self humiliating answer. But, before the witness could answer, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> rose from his chair and at once stopped his own counsel from taking this liberty with the personal honour of the witness.

Although the witness was one of his staunchest enemies, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> would not allow his weakness to be exposed in public. Abdul Hamid, who was supposed to have been instigated by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> to carry out the murder, actually broke down and confessed to having been coached by Dr. Clark.

As the entire case was a fabrication, the judge dismissed the case saying that if Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> wanted to file a suit against Dr. Clark, he was entitled to do so. Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> replied, “I do not want to file a suit against anyone. My suit has already been filed in the Heavenly court.”



In 1903, Maulwi Karam Din—an opponent of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>—filed a libel case against him. When this case was dismissed by the judge, Maulwi Karam Din immediately filed another case for defamation of character. This time the judge, Lala Chandoo Lal, who was

appointed to hear the case, was openly prejudiced against Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>. The judge was being pressured by his own community that now that the “prey” was in his hands, he must give him a sentence of jailing. When Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was apprised of this plan of his opponents, he spontaneously exclaimed: “He considers me his prey—his prey—I am a lion of God. Can he put his hands on the lion of God?”

When efforts were made to have the case transferred to another Judge, Lala Chandoo Lal would not agree. One day, the judge held his court out in the open where a number of persons could attend the proceedings. During the interrogation, the judge asked Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>, “Do you claim to be able to show Signs?”

The latter replied, “Yes. Whatever Sign you ask for, I can show it at this time!”

But for some fear in the heart of the Judge, the world was deprived of witnessing a spontaneous Sign from God.



One day, Lala Chandoo Lal questioned Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> regarding his well known revelation, “*I shall humiliate him who designs to humiliate thee.*” He asked if this was from God. Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> replied in the affirmative, saying that it was a promise made by God to him that whoever intends to humiliate him, God shall humiliate him. At this the judge asked several times, “What if I intend to do it?”

Each time, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> answered, “Whoever does it.”



One day Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was lying down on a carpet when some people advised him that Lala Chandoo Lal intended to incarcerate him. At this he sat up and said, “I don’t even see Lala Chandoo Lal presiding in the court.”

As it so happened, the government transferred Lala Chandoo Lal to another city from where he took retirement and later developed mental illness and passed away.

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Once a young man in his late teens fell ill in a village and his mother brought him to Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> in Qadian for treatment. However, the young man lived for only a few days and passed away. Out of compassion, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> performed his funeral prayer. The prayer went on for such a long time that many persons became troubled and restless. After the prayer was over, he explained that he prayed so earnestly for the young man and did not stop until he actually saw him entering paradise and walking around in it.

That night, the young man's mother saw her son strolling comfortably in paradise. He remarked that he was forgiven and shown mercy due to the prayer of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>. Although the mother was extremely saddened at the death of her son, this happy dream became a source of great comfort and joy for her<sup>165</sup>.

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One of the most obvious traits of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's personality was the extreme love that he harboured in his heart for the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. He could readily put up with any injury or abuse directed at his own person but could not tolerate a single word of insult directed at his spiritual master. He often used to state that it would hurt him far less to see his own family members cut down in front of him than any calumny directed at the noble character of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>.

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A close Companion of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> reports that one day the latter was strolling in the yard and constantly reciting a verse of Hassan bin Thabit that the Arab poet had composed at the demise of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup>. This verse goes as follows:

“Thou wert the pupil of my eye; by thy death my eye has gone blind;  
Anyone may die now after thee; we were only afraid of thy death.”

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<sup>165</sup> This incident is mentioned by Pir Sirajul Haq Nu'mani in his book, *Tadhkiratul Mahdi*, published in 1915.



While reciting the above verse, tears were flowing out of the eyes of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> and he was saying, “How I wish that I was the one who had composed this verse.”



Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> was a great proponent of fidelity and loyalty. One day he said:

“My faith is this that for a person who takes on a vow of friendship, I have this consideration that it does not matter as to how that person is and whatever may come to pass, I cannot break my relation with him. However, if he breaks the relationship himself, then we are powerless. Otherwise, our faith is this that if one of our friends has drunk liquor, and he has fallen down in the street, we will bring him in without fear of blame and censure. The covenant of friendship is a priceless gem which should not be lost easily. And whatever unseemly behaviour is displayed by the friends, one should use the way of overlooking and forbearance.

“If a person is lying intoxicated with liquor, we will bring him in and will try to revive him. When he is about to come into his senses, we will get away from him so that he does not feel shame upon seeing us.”



Towards the end of 1905, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> received repeated revelations intimating him of his own death:

“Only a little is left from the term appointed by your Lord.”

“Only a few days are left. All will be saddened on that day.”

“The end of thy appointed term is approaching and We shall not leave any cause of humiliation for thee.”

“Thy time is near and We shall keep up for thee clear signs.”



In December 1905, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> wrote a booklet called "*Al-Wasiyyat*" (The Will) in which he recorded his last testament to the Ahmadiyya Community. In it he urged the members of the Community to bring about a change for the better in their lives and to live up to the standard demanded by Islam. He also told them that on his departure from this world, God would send His Second Manifestation to the world. He instructed the Community to be sympathetic towards each other and to get rid of their low passions. He further said:

“Do not think that God will let you go waste. You are the seed that God has planted with His own hands. God says that this seed will grow and blossom and its branches will spread out to all directions and it will become a big tree. Blessed are those who believe in what God says and do not fear the trials that come in between.”



In April 1908, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> travelled to Lahore accompanied by his family. During his stay there he made numerous speeches, met with a succession of visitors and wrote his last book entitled *Paigham-e Suluh* or Message of Reconciliation. This book was addressed to Hindus and Muslims alike to patch up their quarrels and sign a formal pact to tolerate one another and enjoy the benefits of unity and peace. He told the two groups that unwarranted attacks on the scriptures and prophets of other people cause only hatred and that more understanding should be used in religious matters. Even in the presence of differing viewpoints, he said, mutual respect could bring the people closer.



On May 20, 1908, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> received his last revelation in Arabic:

“It is the time of departure; yes, it is the time of departure and death is near.”

Six days later, on May 26, 1908, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> passed away.



Saiyadah Nawab Mubarka Begum, the daughter of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>, narrates that the evening before his death, her father was sitting in the courtyard of the house in Lahore and writing his last book (*Paigham-e Suluh*). His face mirrored a very special zest and a certain reddish shade and his pen was running faster than usual. She says that at that moment she remembered a dream of hers that caused her much apprehension and she tried hard to remove it from her mind. In her dream, he had appeared just like this, sitting on the bed and writing like this. She says that just before coming to Lahore, she had seen in the dream that:

*“I am in the lower level in our courtyard (in Qadian) and go towards the circular room where a lot of people are present as if a special meeting is going on. Maulwi Abdul-Karim comes to the door and says to me, ‘Bibi, go and tell your father that the Holy Prophet and the Companions have come and they are calling for him.’ I go upstairs and see that the Promised Messiah is sitting on the bed and is writing with great speed and there is a special aspect to his countenance which is bright and full of zest. I say to him, ‘Father, Maulwi Abdul-Karim says that the Holy Prophet has come with his Companions and they are calling for you.’ He lifts up his gaze while still writing and says, ‘Go and tell them that I will be there as soon as this writing is finished.’”*

She narrates that it was exactly the same scene that she saw in the courtyard of the house in Lahore the evening before he passed away.



A good portion of the writings of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> is in the form of poems in Urdu, Arabic and Persian languages that are dedicated to the praise of God and the beauties of Islam and Qur'an. Although the entire poetry of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> is extremely moving and elegant, it reaches its greatest height when he begins to speak of his true love—his Lord and Master. His love of God comes out so intense and forceful in his writings that it amounts to a fiery passion. Without exaggeration, his love for God has no like in its depth and intensity in the annals of poetic literature of Islam or of any other faith. Much of his emotions in this respect are shown in the traditional

symbolic language of mysticism where God is frequently addressed and spoken of as one's Dear and Belovèd. Below is a poem taken from his Urdu book, *Surma Chashm Arya*, written in 1886. The poem is in praise of the Lord of the worlds:

“How manifest is the light from that Spring-Head of Lights!  
The entire universe has turned into a mirror for the eyes.  
Beholding the moon yesterday, I became so restive  
For I saw therein a glimpse of my Dear One's Splendour.  
My heart is awash with the blooming of that Beauty  
Pray mention not to me the Turk or the Tatar<sup>166</sup>!  
What show of Thy splendour is all around, My Dear,  
Wherever we look, that way leads to Thy View!  
Thy grandeur is witnessed in the light of the sun,  
Thy dazzle is displayed in every star.

“With Thine own Hands, Thou sprinkled the salt on the souls  
That caused this clamour of love among the disconsolate lovers.  
What wonderful traits hast Thou placed in every atom!  
And who is there who can read such immensity of secrets?  
No one can ascertain the limits of Thy might;  
Who can find the solution to this perplexing enigma?  
All beauties carry a charm of Thine own Splendour;  
Each flower and orchard is tinged with Thine own Garden.  
The drunken eye of every belle reveals Thee each instant;  
To Thee points the hand of every curling lock.

“Many a veil obstruct the blind of eye—otherwise  
The godly and the ungodly were all turned to Thee.  
Thy charming looks, O Dear, are a sharpened sword  
That cuts off the entire concern for the strangers.  
To meet with Thee, we have mingled with the dust,  
So that it may remedy this pain of separation.

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<sup>166</sup> Turks and Tatars, the supposedly handsome people of the Caucasus Mountains of Central Asia.

*Inspiring Moments in Islamic History*

I cannot rest a single moment without Thee;  
It chokes my life—like gasping of an indisposed.  
What's the clamour in Thy lane, pray find quickly,  
Lest some lovelorn lover may lose his life!"



## **Hakim Nuruddin (1841-1914 C.E.)**

Born at Bhera, near Sargodha in the Punjab province of modern-day Pakistan, Hakim Nuruddin became a well-respected physician practising traditional medicine, and a renowned scholar of Islamic studies. He had mastery over Urdu, Persian and Arabic languages and considerable knowledge of the Hebrew language as well. He was noted for his discourses on Hadith and the commentary of the Holy Qur'an. He travelled widely in India and stayed for a period in Mecca and Medina to learn religious knowledge from the masters of the time.

In 1871, at the age of thirty, he settled down in Bhera and opened a religious school, teaching the Qur'an and Hadith. At the same time he started his practice of traditional medicine.



As his reputation spread, he was appointed as the Royal Physician at the court of Maharaja Ranbir Singh<sup>167</sup> (1830-1885) of Jammu and Kashmir in India. He carried out this undertaking for fourteen years. Once the Raja said to his courtiers with reference to Hakim Nuruddin:

“Each one of you is here on some purpose, to seek some favour from me or to flatter me. But this person is the only one who has no axe to grind because he is needed by the state. This is the reason why whatever is said by him is listened to carefully as he has no ulterior motive.”



Despite being a successful physician and a highly respected scholar, Hakim Nuruddin always dressed very simply and led an extremely austere life. He abhorred all outward trappings of eminence and his appearance mirrored the great humility that he carried in his heart. When the Raja of Kashmir issued an order for his courtiers and high-ranking officials to wear valuable and impressive attire, Hakim Nuruddin totally ignored the

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<sup>167</sup> Ranbir Singh was a highly educated person. He was a scholar of classical Persian and also well versed in English and Swedish languages. The trans-Himalayan territories of Gilgit, Astore and Hunza were conquered in his time and made part of Jammu and Kashmir. At his death in 1885, he was succeeded by Pratap Singh (1848-1925).

order and continued to attend the court dressed as usual. However, one area in which he never refrained from spending liberally was the purchase of books. He loved collecting rare manuscripts and never hesitated from ordering books from faraway places, or even having them copied by hand. It is reported that his personal library ran into nearly thirty thousand books worth hundreds of thousands of rupees. Some noted Indian scholars such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Maulana Shibli Nu'mani (1857-1914), and Maulana Abul-Kalaam Azad (1888-1958), benefited from his collection of books one time or another.

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One night during his stay in Kashmir, a messenger came to fetch him as the Rajah was feeling unwell. While Hakim Nuruddin was getting ready to leave, a cleaning lady appeared, wailing that her husband was seriously ill. Hakim Nuruddin immediately started walking towards her place despite the protests of the messenger. Hakim Nuruddin told him that the lady was in greater need of the help and that he will attend to the Raja as soon he was finished.

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In 1885, while still working as a physician in Jammu, Hakim Nuruddin came across a poster published by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> with respect to his claims. Immediately, he set foot for Qadian to meet him in person. On seeing him face to face, his heart immediately accepted the truthfulness of the claimant and he was ready to sacrifice his life for him. His present stay in Qadian was brief, but he soon returned to the little hamlet. This time, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> asked him not to leave the place. Hakim Nuruddin narrates that after that day, even the thought of his hometown never crossed his mind. When the institution of *Bai'at* was established in 1889, Hakim Nuruddin was the first person to give his allegiance at the hand of his spiritual master. After the demise of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> in 1908, Hakim Nuruddin took on the mantle of Khilafat as his First Successor. His temperament, character, sincerity and faithfulness, parallel those of Abu Bakr who also succeeded the Prophet Muhammad<sup>pbuh</sup> as his first successor.

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When Hakim Nuruddin left the employment of the Maharaja of Kashmir, he did not have any savings at all. All the remuneration that he used to receive as the Royal Physician would go towards supporting the orphans, the widows and other needy persons. There was a shopkeeper in Jammu who always used to urge Hakim Nuruddin to save some money for the proverbial rainy day. On this particular day that Hakim Nuruddin was getting ready to leave Kashmir, the shopkeeper reminded him of his advice that he used to tender. The latter responded, “I looked at your advice with contempt in the past and have the same contempt today.” While they were still conversing, an official of the treasury brought 480 rupees to him as balance of the unpaid salary. About the same time, the Rani (wife of the Raja) sent a messenger with considerable cash as gift. To overcome the embarrassment of this unusual development, the shopkeeper reminded Hakim Nuruddin that he still owed some hundred and fifty thousand rupees to a Hindu lender who would never let him go. He had hardly finished saying this when a messenger came from the very lender and said, “I have been directed by my master to make arrangements for any further cash if required and to help you do your packing.”



Perhaps the most well known trait of Hakim Nuruddin, and which was well apparent to everyone who knew him well, was his intense trust in God for all his needs. He often used to say that God would never keep him hungry. One day he was asked by the Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup> to go some place urgently. He barely had time to ask his wife to wrap up his bedding and in no time he was on his way accompanied by two companions. When they alighted at an inn late at night they learned that the kitchen had closed and no other eating place was open. The two companions thought that they would like to see how Hakim Nuruddin takes care of his hunger this day. They all retired to their room and started unpacking their beddings. When Hakim Nuruddin opened his bedding, he found a package inside in which his wife had wrapped some food for him. This he shared with his companions who were now quite embarrassed. When they apprised him of what they were thinking, he said, “You should never test God like this. Suppose there was no food in my bedding. My God would still have taken



care of my hunger as he has promised, but your own faith would have been shaken.”



Once when Hakim Nuruddin was staying in Medina, he had no food to eat at night. While he was walking to the Masjid al-Nabwi for Prayers, a policeman hailed him and took him to his superior who wanted to meet him. The officer had a plateful of some Indian sweets with him that he offered to Hakim Nuruddin, saying, “I thought I would share them with someone from India.”



Quraishi Amir Muhammad Khan of Bhera narrates that once he was in the presence of Hakim Nuruddin when the postman brought a parcel of books for the latter where sixteen rupees had to be paid in cash upon delivery. Hakim Nuruddin had ordered the books some time ago but had no money to pay when they were delivered. At this situation, he remarked, “God has so much compassion for me that I am sure He will send down His beneficence any moment.”

Presently, a Hindu person brought his sick child for treatment. After receiving the prescription, the person placed before him in gratitude a gold sovereign (called a ‘guinea’ and worth 15 rupees at the time) plus one rupee in cash, and left.

Hakim Nuruddin at once rendered prostration in gratitude, saying, “I was confident that my Lord and my Friend will never forsake me. It was possible that the man may not have given me any money at all—as I do not ask for anything in payment as a rule. Or he may have given me only one guinea. But Allah said to him that His humble servant’s needs are to be met in full.”



Another incident of the extreme trust that Hakim Nuruddin placed in God took place in 1905. One time, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> proceeded to Delhi to visit his father-in-law—Mir Nasir Nawab—who had fallen ill. From Delhi, a telegram was sent to Hakim Nuruddin in Qadian to arrive immediately.

At that moment Hakim Nuruddin was in his clinic. He immediately stood up and set foot on his journey, saying that Hadhrat sahib had asked him to come immediately. He did not even visit his home. When his family found out, they sent someone with a blanket to give to him.

At the local depot, he took a horse-drawn buggy and went to the railway station at Batala. However, he did not have any money with him to purchase the train ticket to Delhi. Trusting God, he began strolling on the platform of the station, waiting for the train to arrive.

Meantime, a well-to-do person approached him and asked him to make a visit to his ailing wife. Hakim Nuruddin told him that he could not go with him as he was on his way to Delhi to attend to his master. At this the person suggested that he could bring his wife to the station if Hakim Nuruddin would be kind enough to examine her. So he brought his wife to the station and Hakim Nuruddin wrote a prescription for her after examining her. The person quietly went and purchased a ticket for Delhi and gave it to Hakim Nuruddin along with some money.



Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> showed the greatest of respect for this devotee of his and eulogised him in one of his Persian couplets:

*“Cheh khush bood-e, agar har yak ze ummat, noor-e deen bood-e  
Hameen bood-e, agar har dil pur az noor-e yaqeen bood-e.”*

“How nice it would be if all the followers were like Nuruddin—  
Thus it would be, when every heart is filled by the light of certitude.”



In his book, *Fatah-e Islam*, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup> writes this about Hakim Nuruddin:

“I must ardently make mention of a brother in faith whose name, so behoving owing to his superb qualities, is Nuruddin—‘the light of religion’. I envy his zeal and his sacrifices in the cause of Islam. Seeing this enthusiasm, I am overawed by the glory of the Lord how he exalts the humble being whom He chooses.”



Given to the seeking of knowledge and very simple and austere living, Hakim Nuruddin was an extremely selfless, humble and meek person. Immediately after his election as the Khalifa, a member of the community, who did not know him, asked of another member as to who was this person who had been elected as the Khalifa.

The other member replied: “Do you remember when we used to visit the Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup> and everyone vied with one another to get as close to him as possible, there was this person who would always sit down at the back of the room where the people used to take off their shoes?”

The first person responded, “Yes, I remember.”

The second one continued, “He is the one who has been elected as the Khalifa!”



At the demise of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>as</sup>, a few of his devoted followers approached Hakim Nuruddin and suggested that everyone who was present at the time should give him the oath of allegiance. At this, Hakim Nuruddin made the following address:

“Have a look at my earlier life—I have never been desirous of being an *imam* (leader). When Maulwi Abdul-Karim became the *imam* for the Prayers, I considered myself freed of a heavy responsibility. I know well my own condition and my Lord knows even more. I do not wish for worldly ostentation. If I do have a desire, it is that my Master be pleased with me. I pray for this desire and it is for this reason that I live in Qadian. I have spent a number of days worrying what will be our condition after Hudhur. Therefore, I have been trying for Mian Mahmood’s education to reach such a stage. There are three persons among the relatives of Hudhur. First, Mian Mahmood, who is my brother and my son; I have very special relations with him. From the point of nearness, Mir Nasir Nawab holds a position of respect with regards to us and Hudhur. The third kin is Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. Similarly, there are others who are servants of the faith.

“Thus, I swear by God that you may choose any one of the trustees that I have named and I am ready to give my allegiance. But if you do want to give your allegiance to me, then listen that it is an act of selling oneself. Once

Hudhur gave me a hint not to even think of the homeland. Then my entire esteem and thought became devoted to him and I never thought of the homeland. Thus, giving of allegiance is a difficult task. Now, whichever way your desires may be, you have to obey my orders. If you accept this, then I shall—willy-nilly—take on this responsibility.”

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Once, someone posed a question to Sir Saiyad Ahmad Khan: “If an illiterate acquires knowledge, he becomes educated; if an educated one acquires further knowledge, he becomes a scholar; if a scholar acquires further knowledge, he becomes a Sufi; but if a Sufi advances in his quest of knowledge, what does he become?”

Without hesitation, Sir Saiyad Ahmad replied, “He becomes Nuruddin!”<sup>168</sup>

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After taking on the mantle of Khilafat, Hakim Nuruddin continued to lead the same simple and austere life that he led before. He diligently prayed for the members of the Community and maintained high hopes and expectations from them in return. Chaudhry Zafrulla Khan narrates an incident that took place around 1911, when he was only eighteen years old:

“I had come to Qadian during my holidays and one day I was pressing the body of Hakim Nuruddin when I thought that he had fallen asleep and that I should not disturb him. As I pulled my hand back, he extended his arm and pulled my face in close to his own. As time passed, I gathered that he was praying. Then he removed his arm and said, ‘Son! We have prayed a lot for you.’

It is mentioned here for the benefit of the reader that Chaudhry Zafrulla Khan went on to gain many honours in his life including: membership of the Punjab Legislative Council (1926), President of the Muslim League (1931-32), Minister of Railway (1935), leader of the

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<sup>168</sup> *Al-Badr*, May 6, 1909, p. 3

delegation to the League of Nations (1939), judge of the Federal Court of India (1941-47), Foreign Minister of Pakistan (1947-53), member of the International Court of Justice at The Hague (1954-61), President of the UN General Assembly (1962-63), and President of the International Court of Justice (1970-73).



Maulana Shibli Nu‘mani (1857-1914), a noted scholar of India, once remarked to a delegation of Ahmadis visiting him, “Maulwi Hakim Nuruddin is a giant among scholars and I have a keen desire to meet him. As a matter of fact, I had decided to leave for Qadian but the visit was put off due to an accident.”<sup>169</sup>



Upon his death in 1914, a noted scholar of India and the editor of the *Daily Zamindar*—Maulana Zafar Ali Khan (1873-1956)—wrote this obituary:

“Maulana Hakim Nuruddin sahib who was a great and erudite scholar, passed away on 13<sup>th</sup> March after a long illness. His demise is a great loss and has created a void in Muslim community. It is said that a genius is born after one hundred years. The departed soul undoubtedly belonged to this grand roll of honour.”



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<sup>169</sup> *Al-Badr*, October 27, 1910.

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